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# Stories, Traces of Discourse, and the Tease of Presence: Gertrude Simmons Bonnin as Orator and Indigenous Activist

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STORIES, TRACES OF DISCOURSE, AND THE TEASE OF PRESENCE:  
GERTRUDE SIMMONS BONNIN AS ORATOR AND INDIGENOUS ACTIVIST

by

Paige Allison Conley

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May 2013

ABSTRACT  
STORIES, TRACES OF DISCOURSE, AND THE TEASE OF PRESENCE:  
GERTRUDE SIMMONS BONNIN AS ORATOR AND INDIGENOUS ACTIVIST

by

Paige Allison Conley

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013  
Under the Supervision of Professor Alice M. Gillam

An accomplished writer, editor, musician, teacher, organizer, lobbyist, and political reformer, Gertrude Simmons Bonnin worked tirelessly during the first half of the twentieth century to enhance opportunities for Native Americans. Literary texts authored by Bonnin (writing as Zitkala-Ša) are well known, but her legacy as an early twentieth-century orator and indigenous activist receives little critical attention. Emerging histories within rhetoric and composition continue to recover generally ignored or previously marginalized voices, but we still lack studies specifically examining public speeches made by individuals, particularly women, who sought to both survive within dominant American society, and simultaneously maintain, if not advance, sovereign forms of identity, community, and culture.



A careful review of Bonnin's early twentieth-century efforts to advance indigenous concerns provides scholars with rich opportunities to examine rhetoric from perspectives beyond the Western Eurocentric canon. Her rhetorical maneuvers as an orator, particularly between 1920 and 1925, frequently invoked Dakota culture and continually reworked Western Eurocentric rhetorical forms—specifically *epideixis* and *ethos*—as sites of agency and resistance. Recovering this history enriches our

understanding of *survivance* as articulated by Gerald Vizenor and continues to enlarge our understanding of multivalent, cross-cultural forms of rhetorical production.

This project recovers and critically analyzes an important legacy of early twentieth-century political activism, illustrating powerful means for effectively resisting, essentially refiguring, and meaningfully confronting prevailing discourses of erasure, inequality, or exclusion. The rhetorical strategies Gertrude Simmons Bonnin devised and employed as a public figure are worthy of scholarly attention, most notably for their ability to create discursive formations which affirm and sustain indigeneity from both within, and beyond, dominant culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Year-Which-Renews-Life

Here is one way to begin this story: In the fall of 2008, during an introductory graduate course on rhetoric, Dr. Alice Gillam happened to mention that scholarship addressing the art of discourse still fails to account for effective practices and long-standing traditions which exist beyond the “classical” Western Eurocentric rhetorical canon. I went on to circle that sentence in my notes at least three times. As I review my notes today, I see that I also managed—rather uncharacteristically for someone with my disposition—to mark that section of my notes with exclamation points. I remember searching throughout that fall for voices which could begin to define rhetoric for me in new ways—voices other than Plato, and Aristotle, and Cicero, and Quintilian, voices besides St. Thomas Aquinas or Erasmus, voices in addition to Thomas Hobbes or Hugh Blair, voices beyond Lloyd Bitzer and Kenneth Burke.

One day in late October of 2008, I found myself searching through the “Non-Circulating Storage” shelves at our university library, hoping to find copies of the *Congressional Record* from the 1920s. I can no longer recall how I first came to learn of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin and her recitation of the “Dacotah Ode” before the Washington Monument in June of 1922, but I do know that my initial encounter with this speech text sent me immediately to my local archive. I felt compelled to know more about this speech—its context, its constraints, and its modes of production, if not its intent and aim. At the time, I did not understand fully the profound tensions this speech act managed to navigate and the nuanced, sophisticated linguistic skills it evoked, but I

did recognize that I needed to spend much, much more time reviewing and studying why these words happened to be so moving and so powerful, for me.

Those questions continued to shape my journey as a scholar of rhetoric and composition for the next five years. They led me to pursue coursework in other departments, enroll in summer seminars, and attend national conferences in other disciplines. They led me to rich—often overwhelming—archives located throughout the country. They led me to read, to speak, and to write more than I ever thought possible.

Now, during this past year, as I pour through a seemingly endless list of scholarly texts and groaning stacks of research documents piled high upon on my desk, I struggle to piece together a new story of rhetoric. In those moments when I encounter fatigue and frustration, I have found great comfort and no small degree of inspiration from the following words published in an *American Indian Magazine* article from 1930:

### **The Year-Which-Renews-Life**

Zitkala-Sa, Dakota Sioux, told an Indian defense worker, out of her memory which seems a vast land:

‘When there died a man or woman of virtue, or much loved, a year had to pass by. Then one who loved the dead might undertake The Year-Which-Renews-Life.

One could not carelessly undertake the Year-Which-Renews-Life. One must hesitate, and none were obligated to the year. One who did undertake it must never falter.

All of that year, the life-renewer must live with heartiness. He must use his whole power to live and to love. He must give everything,

and his ardor must reach to the earth, to animals, and to man. He must admit no bitterness or regrets, and no hate or retaliations in deed or in thought. He must give himself in order to make joy. All things of common life he must attend to wholeheartedly, and he must seek, with deep attention and no fear, all things strange which haunt life, in the mind and in the earth. There need not be any hero actions, unless common life requires them or vision shows that hero actions are required . . . .’

Millions in a listening, disillusioned, re-illusioned, vigil-keeping White world, on all continents, as far as the shiftings of foundations of the new century have reached, are waiting consciously or unconsciously for the fruits of that Year-Which-Renews-Life. Millions of children, who need no shifting of foundations, are waiting. The fruits will be life-functions, and life-forms and ‘values,’ created of old and by intention forever, by or through the mysterious, eternal human race. (1)

In my listening, disillusioned, re-illusioned, vigil-keeping world, I too, seek to undertake the Year-Which-Renews-Life. I strive to listen for memory and for story, to attend wholeheartedly to this task, to make joy, to seek with deep attention and no fear “all things strange which haunt life.” It is my hope that the fruits of this year will lead, at least in some small part, to renewal and rebirth, to a richer understanding of the art of discourse, and to those life-functions, those life-forms, those values *also* created from a tradition—of old and by intention, that lasts—forever.

## CHAPTER ONE

### TELLING A STORY OF PRESENCE GERTRUDE SIMMONS BONNIN AS ORATOR AND EARLY 20th-CENTURY INDIGENOUS ACTIVIST

-- "Native selves are stories, traces of discourse, and the tease of presence."  
Gerald Vizenor <sup>1</sup>

#### Overview

An extraordinarily talented woman, Gertrude Simmons Bonnini accomplished a great deal during her lifetime. Known primarily as writer and activist, Bonnini published literary texts, served as editor of a national publication, taught school, performed as a concert violinist, co-authored an opera, worked as a community organizer, and engaged in numerous forms of political activism to improve conditions for early twentieth-century Native American communities. Bonnini's efforts as a political advocate included writing manifestos, waging prolific letter-writing campaigns, testifying before national legislative hearings, serving as a government-appointed investigator, and making a large number of public speeches. While scholars examining her record as a political advocate often reference her exceptional abilities as a speaker,<sup>2</sup> very little is known about the actual orations or the specific speech performances that worked to establish Bonnini's reputation as an effective orator. Thus, there is a dearth of scholarship examining the national advocacy efforts Bonnini undertook for decades from the speaker's podium. When scholars do examine Bonnini's political efforts in more careful detail, they frequently remark upon her early, leading role in the Society of American Indians ("SAI") and her strong opposition to peyote, but fail to take up considerations of the skill and technique she displayed through oration during her time on the speaking platform. After stepping down from the SAI in 1917, Bonnini worked tirelessly, until her death in 1938, at

national, regional, and local levels on a number of political causes, speaking frequently and often engagingly, to audiences located comfortably within dominant American society and culture.

Several scholars working within the field of Native American or American Indian Studies, particularly Robert Warrior, argue that the value of Bonnin's work as an early twentieth-century Native American intellectual and advocate is difficult to assess, given the assimilationist stance generally associated with members of the SAI. Yet this view fails to account for the complex rhetorical strategies Bonnin developed and employed as a public speaker. In addition to looking carefully at Bonnin's orations, there is a need for scholars to assess her ability to access and meaningfully utilize the limited discursive platforms available to women doubly or multiply marginalized during this time period due to prevailing notions of race and ethnicity, as well as gender.

This project closely examines two discursive events occurring between 1920 and 1925 in an effort to recover and reexamine Bonnin's role as an effective, early twentieth-century public advocate. While several literary scholars have explored, in fairly cursory fashion, Bonnin's early oratory experiences as a student at Earlham College, this project analyzes the rhetorical strategies and practices undertaken by Bonnin during the 1920s, her most active decade as a public speaker, as she sought to achieve wider kinds of social, economic, and political support for indigenous communities across diverse, wide-ranging national forums.

Born within the Yankton community in 1876, Bonnin left her home at the age of eight and received thorough training in Euro-American language, tradition, and culture within the Native American boarding school system established during the latter half of

the nineteenth century. As discussed at greater length in the pages that follow, this educational background, despite its painful and complex legacy, enabled Bonnin to invoke multi-faceted, cross-cultural skills as an orator and rhetor for most of her adult life. While any review of her legacy of political activism must initially take up notions of assimilation, agency, and resistance, these concepts need to be troubled—pushed beyond simplistic and often dangerous binaries (i.e., white/ red, assimilated/non-assimilated, resistance/assimilation) frequently found within contemporary scholarship in order to more fully address Bonnin’s multi-dimensional, polyvalent rhetorical production.

By examining Bonnin’s rhetorical legacy in an interdisciplinary fashion, and by specifically applying critical frameworks from feminist rhetorical studies and indigenous studies as explained in later sections of this chapter, this project seeks to more readily account for the situated nature of Bonnin’s speech acts, the complex, fluid subjectivities she invoked as rhetor, and the multi-voiced rhetorical strategies and discourses she frequently deployed as a public figure. Gerald Vizenor, a leading Native American scholar, asserts that terms such as *indian* and *Indian* operate semiotically to commemorate absence, but “Native selves are stories, traces of discourse, and the tease of presence” (*Fugitive Poses* 20). Each of the rhetorical events examined within this work occurred within socio-cultural contexts constrained significantly by widely circulating discourses of “Indianness,” the “Indian Cause,” or the “Indian”—discourses of native erasure and absence, rather than presence. Arguably, Bonnin often relied upon the power of story, and a trace reworking or refiguring of prevailing, hegemonic discourses found within dominant culture, as well as a kind of tease—or the powerfully suggestive insertion of some kind of essential and provocative native *presence* as she worked

diligently throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but particularly between 1920 and 1925, to create conditions of possibility for more just, more liberatory spaces for indigenous peoples.

Remaining sections of this introductory chapter provide a brief background on Bonnin's life as a writer, activist, and advocate prior to 1925, and then present an overview of Bonnin's recognized accomplishments as a skilled orator in order to highlight the scholarly significance of recovering and continuing to reexamine this rhetorical history. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the interdisciplinary theoretical framework invoked for this project to identify, assess, and critically examine Bonnin's use of the speaker's platform between 1920 and 1925 as an effective form of indigenous activism.

Brief Background  Gertie Felker, Gertrude Simmons, Zitkala-Ša, Gertrude Bonnin

Born on February 22, 1876 near the Yankton Agency in Dakota Territory <sup>3</sup> and baptized the following April as Gertie Eveline Felker, <sup>4</sup> the historical record indicates that Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, as Gertie, was the daughter of Táte I Yóhin Win and her third husband, William Felker.<sup>5</sup> Raised by her mother, who went by the name of Ellen Simmons for most of her adult life, Gertie Eveline initially adopted the name of Gertrude Simmons and later chose to rename herself as a young woman in her twenties when a sister-in-law reportedly accused her of deserting their community of origin (Spack 59; Hafen, *Dreams* at xvii). This renaming produced "Zitkala-Ša," which translates from Lakota into English as Red Bird.

With this self-given Lakota name, Bonnin continued to embrace multiple cultural influences reflecting her multivalent Sioux background. Her heritage originates from



within the Yankton community,<sup>6</sup> but she often used the Nakota dialect when speaking in her native language, and reserved Dakota linguistics for her writing.<sup>7</sup> After her marriage in 1902, Bonnin used the names Zitkala-Ša, Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, and Mrs. R. T. Bonnin interchangeably. As discussed in later sections of this essay, for business dealings in Yankton, for her work within the SAI, and for her political efforts in Washington, she often signed her name as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, Mrs. R.T. Bonnin or Mrs. Bonnin. In her work with the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and in her personal correspondence, she referred to herself as "Zitkala" or simply "Z." Archival reviews indicate that Bonnin preferred to use Zitkala-Ša as her literary identity and tended to employ "Mrs. Bonnin," "Gertie," "Gertrude Bonnin," or "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin" as her name while engaging specifically in political advocacy work, which is the primary focus here.<sup>8</sup>

As these fluid naming practices evidence, Bonnin's lived experience embraced at least two distinct cultural formations. Bonnin began her life within the Yankton community, but left this home in 1884 when Christian missionaries came to recruit children for White's Manual Labor Institute, a Quaker boarding school in Wabash, Indiana. A national policy of forced assimilation and the barbaric conditions of many boarding schools carrying out this far reaching agenda have been clearly documented. With the closing of the frontier in the late 1800s, domestic policies aimed at rapid assimilation or isolation and removal replaced the slaughter of indigenous populations.<sup>9</sup> Upon their arrival at most boarding schools, Native children were dressed in Western clothing and completely "refashioned" figurally, as an attempt to begin a complete, and often violent, totalizing acculturation process [See Figure 1].<sup>10</sup> They were no longer

allowed to speak in their Native languages, even amongst themselves, in the belief that they would assimilate more thoroughly and more quickly to dominant culture if they spoke English at all times (Baumgartner 132, Hertzberg 16).



Fig. 1. Students at White's Indiana Manual Labor Institute, 1886.  
Bonnin is third from left in the front row.

While Bonnin could express herself in “somewhat in broken English” within a year of her arrival at White’s Institute,<sup>11</sup> her boarding school experience would continue to be a source of life-long conflict for her. Bonnin’s own writing about this period highlights shock, trauma, and abuse related to issues of language, articulation, and voice.<sup>12</sup> Despite these initial and substantial challenges at White’s, Bonnin grew to become a gifted, multi-lingual orator and writer.<sup>13</sup> She attended Santee Normal Training School on the Santee Reservation in Nebraska between 1888 and 1890 [See Figure 2],

returning to her Yankton home for a brief period, before leaving again for White's in February of 1891.



Fig. 2. Students at Santee Normal Training School, ca. 1890.  
Bonnin is third from right in the back row.

Bonnin's short time in South Dakota during this period could have been marred by two horrific events. On December 15, 1890 federal authorities murdered the Lakota leader, Sitting Bull, on the Standing Rock Reservation, just a short distance away from both Santee and Yankton. Fourteen days later, on December 29, 1890, more than 150 Lakota men, women, and children were killed at Wounded Knee Creek. Bonnin's departure for White's the next February could be attributed, in part, to the turmoil and despair associated with these events.

Upon her graduation from White's in 1895, Bonnin enrolled at Earlham College briefly, winning honors at oration and representing the college in the Indiana State Oratorical Contest in the spring of 1896. In the summer of 1897, Bonnin accepted a teaching position at the Carlisle Industrial School, where she remained until the winter of

1899.<sup>14</sup> During this period, she became engaged to Thomas Marshall, a Lakota from Pine Ridge studying at Dickinson College, who died unexpectedly of the measles just a short time later (Rappaport 79).

Bonnin eventually made her way to the New Conservatory of Music in Boston to study the violin and remained there until the summer of 1901. During this period, Bonnín also met photographer Gertrude Käsebier who constructed a series of images of Bonnín that visually reference multiple cultural influences and speak to Bonnín's evolving identity and subjectivity as a public figure [See Figure 3].



Fig. 3. Photographs of Bonnín by Gertrude Käsebier, ca. 1898.

During her time in New England, Bonnín received a high degree of literary recognition as her fiction and her autobiographical essays were published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, as well as *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, and she published a collection of short stories based on oral traditions she inherited from her mother, her aunts, and her grandmother entitled *Old Indian Legends*. It was also during this time that she met, and became engaged to Carlos Montezuma, the young Yavapai doctor who would later become a leading

member of the SAI along with Bonnin. Anxious to spend time with her mother, and her Yankton community, Bonnin returned to South Dakota in the summer of 1902, encouraging Montezuma to join her there. Montezuma did not share her interest in returning to reservation life and their engagement ended abruptly in 1901.

In 1902, Bonnin married Raymond Telephouse Bonnin, also a member of the Yankton community and a childhood friend. They moved to rural Utah, where Raymond had obtained a federal job working among the Ute Indians. Bonnin gave birth to their only child, a son named Ohiya, in 1903. Gertrude engaged in some teaching and also worked to organize a community center during her time in Utah, but after she joined the SAI in 1913,<sup>15</sup> her growing role within this organization ultimately led the couple to move to Washington, D. C. in March of 1917.<sup>16</sup>

The Bonnins made the city of Washington their home until Gertrude's death in 1938 but for the remainder of their lives, they continued to travel frequently throughout the United States. During these early trips, Bonnin addressed SAI matters and worked on a number of key political initiatives. For most of this period, Bonnin was a prominent speaker at national and local gatherings of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and other civic organizations throughout the country. Her work with the General Federation of Women's Clubs (or "GFWC"), particularly her address in 1921 at the annual meeting held in Salt Lake City, helped to start a national Indian Welfare Committee.<sup>17</sup> While Bonnin was often asked to speak about her literary texts or relay "Old Indian tales" for entertainment, she used these opportunities to raise awareness about the "Indian Problem" and to interest her audience, particularly the women of GFWC, as a powerful

voting bloc, in helping to support Native concerns, particularly with respect to health, education, and the right of self-determination.

Despite her extensive speaking schedule, Bonnin also worked doggedly between 1920 and 1930 to affect more concrete political change in Washington. In addition to penning letters to legislators and policy-makers, she appeared before a number of legislative forums, often testifying before Congressional hearings, and further using her position in Washington to advocate for land preservation,<sup>18</sup> as well as greater educational and economic opportunities for indigenous communities. Her efforts to reach even larger audiences through print media continued to grow during this period. By 1915 Bonnin had joined the editorial board of the SAI's quarterly journal and frequently submitted articles. During the fall of 1918, Bonnin became the editor of this publication, *The American Indian Magazine*. As she assumed this role, Bonnin continued to fight for Native communities, frequently calling for enlarged forms of enfranchisement.<sup>19</sup>

Bonnin also worked closely with her husband during this period to benefit Sioux communities through adjudication, seeking specifically to secure the right to pursue claims related to the loss of tribal rights to the Black Hills in the United States Court of Claims. Indeed, after serving as an Army Captain from 1917 through 1919,<sup>20</sup> Raymond had enrolled in night law school at George Washington University and, for a brief period of time, worked during the day as a law clerk at the prominent Washington firm of Munn, Anderson, and Munn. The Bonnins' personal papers remaining from this period indicate that Gertrude and Raymond worked closely, and often collaboratively, on legal concerns. Bonnin's role as a political activist and advocate during this era appears to be shaped by deliberate efforts to form extensive social and political networks designed to engage in

“thought, assessment, and action” that cut across existing socio-economic divisions of race and class. This phrase is borrowed from Frederick E. Hoxie’s essay “Missing the Point: Academic Experts and American Indian Politics” in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism Since 1900*. Hoxie urges scholars to understand Native communities as “active nodes of assessment, thought, and action...constantly involved with, and responding to, a variety of new conditions, some created by external forces generated nationally or locally, and some produced by an internal dynamic of change and innovation” (30). While Bonnin is unlikely to have articulated the nature of her work in Hoxie’s terms, in a letter to fellow SAI member, Carlos Montezuma, Bonnin notes: “To influence Congress, we must interest the American People; that means a concentrated campaign, by the press and lecture platform.”<sup>21</sup>

Her work carried her from the wealthy salons of New York and Chicago, to the hallowed urban spaces of Washington, and poverty-stricken rural areas in the South, West, and Midwest. While the city of Washington served as her home base, she spent a considerable amount of time visiting many regions of the country, as a speaker, and as a community organizer. The foregoing discussion highlights Bonnin’s sophisticated understanding of the multi-faceted nature of activism and the need to work within many discursive forums, and draws further attention to her national reputation as an effective orator able to speak engagingly with, and to, a wide range of audiences.

## Bonnin as Orator and Activist Early Speeches and a Hostile Audience

While scholars tend to focus on Bonnín's literary production, her record as an effective public speaker is varied and extensive. Certainly the art of public speaking represented an essential part of education and literacy training during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in most American schools. This view may have been even more pronounced within boarding school environments focused specifically on English language acquisition for Native American children.<sup>22</sup> Beyond the thorough immersion in English language and Euro-American culture provided through her boarding school experiences, Bonnín grew to adulthood with continued exposure to three Native linguistic patterns—Nakota, Dakota, and Lakota—and she was conversant in all three dialects (Spack, "Translation Moves," 43). Language acquisition scholar Ruth Spack argues that being multilingual gave Bonnín a deep understanding of the variety, purpose, and power of language ("Moves" 58-59). Whether or not this is the case, the existing historical record confirms that Bonnín developed strong, varied linguistic abilities and she put these skills to use, through writing and speaking, without hesitation.

Bonnín's public speaking career started with her delivery of the 1895 graduation oration at White's Institute, which the *Wabash Plain Dealer* labeled "a masterpiece" that "has never been surpassed in eloquence or literary perfection by any girl in this country" (Spack 43-44 citing to Parker and Parker, 71). Deeply touched by Bonnín's oration, at least one audience member offered to pay for Bonnín's college expenses after hearing her speak (Rappaport 97-98). Bonnín also served as a debate instructor at Carlisle, giving several acclaimed speeches during her time there (Enoch 91-92). Prior to her time at Carlisle, Bonnín excelled academically in every subject at Earlham College, including



Latin, and she also participated in college debate and public speaking. In 1896, she won first- and second-place prizes, respectively, in college and state oratory contests.

Many scholars reviewing Bonnin's life work make note of, or at least mention, the Earlham/Indiana college oratory contests of 1896, for these events mark a significant turning point for Bonnin. That February, Bonnin received first place in the oratory contest held at Earlham College, which afforded her the right to represent Earlham at the state contest to be held in Indianapolis that March.<sup>23</sup> Bonnin revised her initial speech for the state contest, lengthening her text and developing a pointed focus.<sup>24</sup> According to historian Deborah Welch, it was the second version of her speech, "Side by Side," that represented the start of Bonnin's political career: the "seeds of Bonnin, the fighter for Indian rights, are to be found in this early address on the essential humanity of Indian peoples" (Welch 11). Bonnin's career as a political advocate may have begun in Indianapolis, but it was also here that she endured humiliation and taunting from an antagonistic crowd, a second place finish due perhaps to prejudiced judges, and biased reporting about her performance in the mainstream press.

Ascending the stage to speak in Indianapolis, Bonnin appeared as the only female contestant and the only figure associated with prevailing notions of race, despite her Western-style dress. She spoke from the podium to a predominantly white audience assembled from many regions throughout Indiana. A later report of her performance in the college newspaper, the *Earlhamite*, indicates that "her pronunciation was without trace of a tongue unfamiliar with English."<sup>25</sup> Bonnin appeared as the last speaker and received a number of cheers from her fellow Earlham supporters as she concluded. However, during her ten-minute speech, some students in attendance from other colleges

draped a large white sheet suspended from a wire depicting a “forlorn Indian girl” with the word “squaw” printed in bold, black letters (Chiarello 1; Rappaport 64-65; *American Indian Stories* 79). The banner remained in full sight, even as the names of the contest winners were announced (Welch 11-12). Writing about the incident years later, Bonnin states: “Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air” (*American Indian Stories* 79).

Bonnin ultimately received the second place prize, but the days following this college event were not without their difficulties. A subsequent story in *The Indianapolis Journal* summarized the state-wide college event under the headline, “How Grades Were Fixed.” The reporter attributed Bonnin’s first place defeat to a low ranking she received from a “Southern” judge based on her “reference to slavery as one of the blots of modern civilization” (Chiarello 3). The paper went on to describe Bonnin’s speech under the subheading, “The Indian Maiden's Effort.” Another regional newspaper reporting on the state contest, *The Indianapolis News* completely overlooked Bonnin’s individual experience by describing the contest as “a wild but cheerful scene, made bright with . . . smiling college girls” (Chiarello 6). Under their subhead, “Cheers for the Indian Maiden,” *The Indianapolis News* described a “slight dark-skinned girl . . . [whose] face showed in delicate but firm lines the cut of the Indian face . . . [and whose] well-shaped hands at her side were of a deep copper color” (6). This second paper goes on to describe Bonnin’s “voice as clear and sweet; her language . . . that of a cultivated young woman . . . [her] manner real, womanly, and refined” (Chiarello 7). Barbara Chiarello argues that

each paper's continual references to Bonnin by race—"the Sioux Indian maiden," and "the pretty young Indian woman . . . who is much better looking than the pictures of the average Indian"—engages in a kind of patronizing treatment not employed with the other contestants. In Chiarello's view, each paper also dismisses or misinterprets Bonnin's "pleading for her people" by describing Bonnin as a curious object to be examined, not as a voice to be heard, and further encourages audiences to interpret her arguments as an exotic performance rather than as a call for change (6).

While Bonnin is welcomed warmly on her return to Earlham from Indianapolis, she falls ill shortly after her performance, perhaps due to exhaustion and mental strain or malaria (Rappaport 66; Welch 12-15). After trying to recuperate for more than six weeks, Bonnin eventually withdraws from Earlham and returns to Yankton.

Arguably, the events in Indiana during February and March of 1896 laid a significant foundation for Bonnin's future experiences as a public speaker. Bonnin may have felt, justifiably, that she would need to find a way to address or resist the taunts and the anger she was certain encounter during this historical period, as both a woman, and as a figure marked by prevailing perceptions of race. At the same time, Bonnin may have recognized that she would also need to find a way to negotiate what Chiarello refers to as dominant society's "pattern of diluting her pro-Indian agenda by complimenting her appearance and delivery, while alternately praising and undermining her words" (7). Certainly, as Chiarello asserts, Bonnin's future efforts to engage publicly in political discourse would require creative persistence in the face of both direct and nuanced responses to her critiques of the status quo—she would need to fight for both access to, and legitimacy within, all available public forums in the days to come.

Despite these early difficulties, over the next few decades, Bonnin managed to establish herself as a well-known public speaker and an effective political advocate. Beyond her experiences at Carlisle giving speeches during school ceremonies and serving as the debate instructor, Bonnin began to speak out publicly on behalf of the SAI in 1916, and by 1919, she appears before national, regional, and local meetings of the GFWC, and the Pen Women's League, to address a wide range of Native American concerns. Her advocacy work involves several decades of preparing and presenting official testimonies before Congress and a significant number of legislative committees; she becomes a popular figure who is asked to speak at a number of national meetings for the Indian Rights Association, the American Indian Defense Association, and the annual Friends of the Indian Lake Mohonk Conference—a remarkable transition from Earlham to Washington and beyond.

This scholarly project does not consider Bonnin's public speaking record prior to 1920, which includes several controversial speeches made by Bonnin against peyote use. I choose to focus instead on a period of time, after her move to Washington, D. C., when she clearly established a role for herself as a nationally recognized public speaker. While there is a need for more scholarship on Bonnin's entire record of oration and oratory performance, that is beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, I believe—and this work attempts to establish—that Bonnin's early and very public opposition to peyote use does not preclude her from later becoming an effective public advocate for indigenous concerns, particularly between 1920 and 1925. Remaining sections of this chapter briefly review the limited scholarship completed to date on Bonnin's efforts as a public speaker and then outline and describe the theoretical framework this project adopts to identify and

assess key moments of Bonnin's life in the public sphere as an advocate and activist for indigenous peoples.

Scholarly interest in Bonnin began to take shape during the second half of the twentieth century with critical reviews first undertaken by historian Deborah Welch and literary scholar Dexter (Alice Poindexter) Fisher. The dissertation completed by Fisher in 1979 on the literary contributions of Zitkala-Ša and Mourning Dove helped to provoke a renewed interest in Bonnin that continues to this day. Most of this ever-expanding body of critical work focuses on Bonnin's literary production, but more recent scholarship also considers her complex, rich legacy as an editor, composer, teacher, and land rights activist,<sup>26</sup> and interest in her work as a nonfiction writer, activist, and advocate is expected to grow. Certainly, more opportunities remain. In particular, the work undertaken by both Bonnin and her husband to seek relief in judicial forums, her frequent testimonies before legislative branches of government during the 1920s and the 1930s, her efforts as a community organizer, and finally, the oratory skills she displayed throughout most of her life,<sup>27</sup> but particularly between 1920 and 1925—all of these areas of Bonnin's life continue to be under studied.

Among the few published works that address Bonnin's efforts to engage in political advocacy through oration and oratory performance is a short epigraph about Bonnin's public speaking career which appeared in *Aboriginal American Oratory: The Tradition of Eloquence among the Indians of the United States* (1965) authored by historian, Louis T. Jones. In this piece, Jones describes Bonnin as an "eloquent Indian woman," and he briefly references one of her appearances before the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1929. Jones asserts that during this speech act, Bonnin "clearly and

concisely revealed the true facts of Indian home life—a definite surprise to many of the whites present” (15-16) but Jones fails to engage in any further analysis or any substantive critique beyond making this statement.

Scholars did not take up an interest in Bonnin’s legacy as a public speaker again until 1984, when William Willard published a brief historical summary of Bonnin’s life in the compendium of essays, *Indian Leadership*. Willard went on to publish a short scholarly piece in the *Wicazo Sa Review* entitled “Zitkala-Ša: A Woman Who Would Be Heard,” which first appeared in 1985. In this later piece, Willard refers to Bonnin as a woman who left a “legacy of activism” for future generations of American leaders:

Her greatest impact on federal Indian policy came about as a result of her appearance at a meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in Atlantic City, New Jersey in May 1922 . . . . Her beaded and fringed costume may have served to catch their attention but her descriptions of the reality of corruption and brutality of the (Indian) Bureau . . . kept their attention and moved them to political action on a national scale (13,16).

Remaining portions of Willard’s article briefly describe Bonnin’s efforts over the next two decades to serve as an educator, lobbyist, and writer.

Willard’s essay on Bonnin came under pointed attack in 1995 when leading scholar, Robert Allen Warrior, argued that Willard’s writing exemplified the kind of problematic scholarship Warrior often found with respect to American Indian intellectual traditions after 1890. Warrior called for Bonnin’s legacy, particularly her work within organizations like the SAI, to be read more “honestly and with less celebration” (*Tribal Secrets* 9-10). Viewing Bonnin’s voice as solely that of a “Christian and secular

assimilationist,” Warrior noted that Bonnin remained opposed to peyote and “other forms of Native existence” throughout most of her adult life (4, 10). A number of contemporary scholars challenge Warrior’s narrow, dismissive view of Bonnin’s complex record, including P. Jane Hafen, Penelope Kelsey, Julianne Newmark, Elizabeth Wilkinson, Barbara Chiarello, and Ruth Spack, but the fact remains that much of this later scholarly work continues to focus on literary analysis and textual production by Bonnin, not her skills and abilities as a public speaker.

Moreover, in my view, Warrior fails to consider the gendered nature of Bonnin’s rhetorical legacy. Certainly in many Western Eurocentric cultures—and clearly during late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America—women seeking to participate in public discourse had to first invent ways to speak within dominant socio-cultural contexts of continually being “silenced and rendered invisible as persons” (Ritchie and Ronald xvii). Consequently, the theoretical framework I adopt for this historical project looks first to feminist theory and then takes up other, more interdisciplinary considerations.

### Theoretical Framework Feminist Rhetorical Studies, Indigenous Studies

The overall framework I adopt for this project draws from feminist rhetorical studies and indigenous studies, the latter term representing a field of inquiry associated most generally with indigeneity, considerations of place, and the study of colonial formations. These two specific disciplines—feminist rhetorical studies and indigenous studies—offer effective methods and methodologies, including ethical, highly regarded approaches to research, and a broad range of theories for analysis well suited to the historical recovery of (multiply) marginalized rhetors. Both forms of scholarship account for the power relationships and the social positioning that affect rhetorical issues related

to access, delivery, and reception for disenfranchised rhetors, like Bonnin, seeking to communicate effectively within dominant culture. Both forms of scholarship, informed by postmodern thought, also continue to embrace notions of identity and subjectivity that account more readily for the varied cultural, linguistic, and psychosocial forces shaping articulation as communication. Both forms of scholarship provide well-accepted means for challenging traditional constructs found within Western Eurocentric rhetorical formations. Viewed together, they enhance opportunities to engage in more complex forms of analysis regarding the polysemous nature of Bonnin's rhetorical production.

Moreover, indigenous studies remains in close association with American Indian and Native American studies, but also rethinks and critically reviews this accepted scholarship by engaging in considerations of the decolonial and further embracing new theoretical constructs derived from globally-positioned tribal worldviews and tribal perspectives. Including concepts from indigenous studies for this project provides enhanced opportunities for critical review and offers more relevant tools for carefully assessing the cross-cultural experiences shaping and informing Bonnin's rhetorical legacy. Postcolonial theory continues to acknowledge and wrestle with ongoing projects of empire through the analysis of *de*-colonial, rather than *post*-colonial formations. The term, decolonial, unlike postcolonial, acknowledges the myth of colonialism as a finished project and encourages scholars to recognize hegemonic formations continuing to shape and influence contemporary life, particularly within geo-political locations like the United States, Mexico, or Australia, where colonialism continues to exist as an ongoing project. Scholars such as Emma Perez and Linda Tuhiwai Smith use the term *decolonial*



to emphasize that we are not past (post) colonial and must work consciously to eradicate the pernicious legacies of colonial and neo-colonial eras.<sup>28</sup>

This theoretical shift within post/colonial studies remains in close dialogue with a growing focus upon indigeneity and cultural formations as indigenous studies—a form of scholarship which seeks to affirm tribal knowledges, tribal practices, and tribal cultures around the globe and further recognize conceptions of native self, native identity, or native community beyond limiting (colonial or neo-colonial) formations associated largely with land rights. As discussed in greater depth below, the field of indigenous studies<sup>29</sup> offers an appropriate analytical framework for more fully examining some of the complex factors influencing Bonnin’s self-construction as a rhetorical figure, including her Yankton roots and heritage, her constant movement between rural and urban communities, and the social forces she encountered as a colonized figure, which inevitably affected her access to rhetorical forums, the forms of delivery she had to select for her message, and the reception afforded to her within dominant culture as a figure speaking—and re/presenting tribal culture, tribal worldviews, tribal perspectives—from the margins.

Read most broadly, feminist rhetorical scholars and indigenous scholars endeavor to assess and rework or refigure cultural formations which create and maintain dominant forms of hegemony, exclusion, and oppression. Feminist scholars seek the elimination of patriarchy and other “relationships of domination, oppression, and elitism,” seeking instead to create “relationships of self-determination, affirmation, mutuality, equality, and respect” (Foss, Foss, and Griffin, *Readings* 2-3). Indigenous scholars seek to “reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant

settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure” (Bird xxx). Both forms of inquiry continue to struggle with means for theorizing, identifying, and constructing more liberatory forms of existence given that many existing academic practices remain intimately connected to histories of hegemony—including, for example, the privileging of a patriarchal Western Eurocentric rhetorical canon. Nonetheless, rather than rejecting the academy completely, both forms of inquiry generally attempt to rework and reshape existing academic knowledge, and thus offer a critical starting point and solid foundation for a thorough review of Bonnin as a rhetorical figure, offering more possibilities for examining intersectionalities of race, class, and gender. Ultimately this particular project, like the scholarly work found within these two fields of study, also seeks to rework dominant paradigms and reconceive traditional, well accepted forms of knowledge and understanding in order to identify greater possibilities for liberation and self-determination.

In my efforts to critically review Bonnin’s public role as orator, particularly after 1920, I seek to challenge key discursive formations and accepted rhetorical constructs that generally operate to exclude, diminish, or silence similar voices. Working within feminist rhetorical studies and indigenous studies simultaneously provides specific means for critiquing socio-cultural terms most relevant to this project, including “woman,” and “Indian,” as well as a means for extending and reworking several well-established rhetorical concepts. For example, this project hopes to move notions of rhetoric further away from a traditional mooring within persuasion, rethink *epideixis* as site or genre for celebrating dominant values, and enlarge current views of *ethos* as stable, singular forms of presence.<sup>30</sup> Finally, this project seeks to extend and enhance accepted forms of

critical review traditionally found within feminist rhetorical studies by considering collaborative forms of rhetoric and by specifically embracing and carefully applying story and tribal theory—essential forms of analysis for studying someone like Bonnin, a rhetorical figure constituted by, and continually drawing upon, knowledges and practices forged from more than one cultural tradition.

### Feminist Rhetorical Studies

Locating this recovery work within feminist rhetorical studies first allows for scholarly forms of inquiry that openly challenge dominant paradigms operating to ignore, exclude, or dismiss voices—like Bonnin’s—marked by gender. Feminism and feminist studies exist as unstable terms with a plurality of meanings, but feminist scholars generally seek to recover, reclaim, redefine, and refigure prevailing cultural traditions, systems, and structures delimited by patriarchy (Tasker and Holt-Underwood 50-55). Feminist scholars working specifically within rhetoric as a field of inquiry “reread” canonical texts, “reclaim” women rhetors in history, and “regender” existing traditions but also revise or reject previously held notions and rework existing discursive formations (Schell and Rawson 7; Ronald 140). The continued examination of histories of rhetoric through feminist research and recovery is radically reshaping our understanding of both “rhetoric” and “tradition.” Although not without its critics,<sup>31</sup> feminist recovery continues to redefine women’s historical use of discourse. For a figure like Bonnin, this theoretical approach provides a critical means for initially assessing and carefully reviewing her early twentieth-century rhetorical production, and further enhances opportunities for identifying some of the significant rhetorical constraints Bonnin encountered during this historical period as a female rhetor.

It is important to note that my theoretical approach to Bonnin examines particular speech acts and the subsequent circulation of these acts as textual (alphabetic) artifacts, placing this scholarly work more squarely within the field of rhetoric and composition, rather than lines of inquiry which tend to coalesce around disciplinary discussions associated with the field of speech and communication. While theoretical constructs for rhetoric developed within speech and communication are certainly relevant, these considerations reach beyond the scope of this investigation and will not be addressed in great detail here.

I adopt feminist rhetorical methods and methodologies for historical research within the field of rhetoric and composition, and then move to more interdisciplinary methods and methodologies related to indigenous studies, as discussed below, to more fully account for intersectionalities of race, ethnicity, and socio-cultural status. With the understanding that method represents “a technique or way of proceeding in gathering evidence” and methodology represents “the underlying theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (Kirsch 68), I invoke this line of feminist rhetorical theory (and the interdisciplinary constructs discussed below) to both gather archival evidence and subsequently analyze this evidence for rhetorical significance. As Eileen Schell and K.J. Rawson recently noted, feminist research is marked by critical self-reflexivity and questioning (4). Guiding principles for rhetorical scholarship as feminist research include: attending continuously and reflexively to the significance of gender, challenging norms of objectivity, carefully addressing ethical concerns, and seeking to emphasize empowerment or transformation (Schell and Rawson 8). Using a feminist lens for this project means to question continually, carefully interrogating the contexts,

conditions, and practices that shaped and informed key moments of Bonnin's rhetorical production in order to discern what may not have been previously noticed or considered.

For work on a historical figure like Bonnin, this kind of scholarship also invokes considerations regarding the ethical ramifications of archival research. Within rhetoric and composition, adopting ethical forms of archival research includes immersing oneself in the study of place, time, and culture; working through thick, rich forms of description to address bias; engaging with members of the subject community whenever possible; examining one's own positionality; and carefully reviewing or triangulating data with other scholarly informants (Gaillet 41-44; McKee and Porter 74-81). These critical considerations apply with equal, if not greater, force to scholarly work involving historical figures who identify themselves as members of indigenous communities. I consider my responsibilities as a scholar working within indigenous studies below, but note here that my research aims as a feminist scholar include needing to decrease the possibility of bias and avoiding problems of anachronism, appropriation, and decontextualization often associated with the historical recovery of marginalized, overlooked, or silenced voices.

Thus, developing specific means for ethical research within feminist rhetorical studies on a historical figure like Bonnin inevitably means thinking more deeply about the forms of historiography used to gather and analyze evidence gleaned from primary archival material and other relevant secondary sources. Beyond routine library research, my investigatory process included archival trips to the Newberry Library in Chicago, the Brigham Young University Library in Provo, Utah, and the Women's History Resource Center in Washington, D.C. As I examined primary and secondary historical sources

gleaned from these locations, and other research sites more generally available to me, I worked slowly and carefully to check and double-check my sources of information in order to establish validity and reliability. I also worked continually to discern context for this early twentieth-century time period, and for each speech act that I selected to analyze, in order to avoid making inferences about intent, motive, or character.

Recognizing the inherent possibility of bias and fallibility despite my best efforts, I strove to engage in careful observation and extensive note-taking in order to produce a thick, rich description<sup>32</sup> of context and key events. I worked carefully to avoid summarizing, generalizing, or hypothesizing, and looked specifically for rhetorical patterns as a form of content analysis. I worked recursively, as well, returning again (and again) to many key sources of information, readjusting my analysis, as needed, in an attempt to maintain “lines of accountability”<sup>33</sup> throughout this research process.

As I proceed with this scholarly work, I continually question my own positionality and how it might be influencing or obscuring this research project—particularly as a non-Native scholar working from a space of relative comfort and privilege. Here, most particularly, I hope to engage in research as a dialogic process, striving to speak *with*, not *for*, the lingering traces—the spirit and essence—of Bonnin that remain, as a woman, as a native presence, and as a rhetorical figure worthy of review and study. As Malea Powell observes when discussing her own experiences with archival research: “History isn’t a dead and remembered object; it is alive and it speaks to us” (“Dreaming Charles Eastman” 121-122). Concluding stages of this research will also involve “speaking further,” specifically seeking input from members of subject communities and carefully reviewing the evidentiary findings, data, and knowledge

gleaned during this work with scholarly informants serving on my doctoral committee from a wide range of disciplines including composition, rhetoric, literature, history, and Native American Studies.

I next look to work by feminist rhetorical scholars situated within the field of composition and rhetoric to think more deeply about other relevant concepts for this project, including definitions for key terms such as “rhetoric,” and “female” and “gender.” Similar to the terms “feminist” or “feminism,” the term rhetoric “has, and seemingly always has had, multiple meanings” (Jasinski, *Sourcebook* xiii). For the purposes of this feminist inquiry, I define rhetoric as communication and rhetorical scholarship as an endeavor to discern coherent, systematic explanations for the ways that communicative symbols and articulations work to create, exchange, and negotiate meaning (Foss, Foss, and Griffin, *Readings* 2). This move links rhetoric and rhetorical acts to communication, rather than notions of persuasion or invitation more commonly associated with the Western Eurocentric rhetorical canon. This theoretical linkage, particularly when used in conjunction with the indigenous theories discussed below, provides opportunities to more fully assess rhetorical effect for a civic rhetor like Bonnin. Speaking from a multiply marginalized position, for example, Bonnin may have only been able to disrupt or trouble dominant discursive formations rather than “persuade” audiences within the space of a few minutes to radically shift deeply held views or abruptly alter well ingrained policies and practices related to indigenous culture.<sup>34</sup>

To further frame my analysis, I adopt the views of Susan Jarratt, Celeste Condit, and many others who encourage feminist researchers to think in terms of social constructions of gender, rather than social constructions of “female,” “woman,” or

“women.” Notions of gender are contingent, fluid, and performative—rhetors adopt or select from an assortment of stylistic features coded as masculine or feminine in order to adapt ethos and discourse to specific rhetorical situations. While I use terms such as “woman,” “women,” or “female” throughout this discussion, I employ these terms as shorthand for a much larger kind of inquiry intended to examine the gendered nature of rhetorical acts. Within examinations of rhetoric, gendered language can function in very particular, very limiting ways. Operating as a subset, as a kind of cordoning off within the larger social category of gender, the terms woman/women often work to exclude an “other”—men, “othered” women, certainly “raced” bodies, but also many “classed” bodies as well. If, as researchers and scholars, we move to a more complex view of gendered interactions, we begin to work within a larger field of social dynamics and power relations; indeed, we encounter more opportunities for understanding the myriad of ways that gender and its rhetorical landscapes are constructed by notions of otherness.

Certainly, as Cindy Griffin and Karma Chávez openly acknowledge, the first four decades of feminist research generally ignored, resisted, or marginalized concepts of otherness and intersectionality—as diversity, multiple identities, multiple forms of oppression, or white privilege, for example—and often produced scholarly work that universalized the experiences of elite, heterosexual, white women or worked erroneously from monolithic frameworks based solely on gender (xi). Indeed, in her essay, “There is No Word for Feminism in My Language,” Laura Tohe observes: “When Indian women joined the feminist dialogue in the 1970s, we found that equality for women was generally directed toward white women's issues. The issues that were relevant to our tribal communities were not part of white feminist dialogue. Most Indian families were



struggling just to survive” (109). Tohe’s essay concludes with the following observation: “There was no need for feminism because of our matrilineal culture. And it continues. For Diné women, there is no word for feminism” (110). This project, as a feminist examination of discursive histories and discursive opportunities provided to indigenous women within *dominant* culture, aligns with and does not dispute Tohe’s understanding of the relationship between feminism and tribal cultural formation(s). Moreover, twenty-first-century feminists working with poststructural theory, postcolonial theory, postmodern theory, critical race theory, cultural studies, and ethnic studies continue to challenge, extend, and redefine key concepts—particularly notions of gender, self, identity, and community—embracing these intersectionalities of race and gender in new and more productive ways (Kirsch 11).

Recent texts by Shirley Logan and Jacqueline Jones Royster, for example, examining the rhetorical histories of African American women, as well as work by Malea Powell and Jessica Enoch on the rhetorical histories of Native American and Chicana women clearly evidence that many feminist scholars continue to push existing research in complex interdisciplinary directions in order to more adequately address notions of “otherness” within the field of rhetoric and composition. Looking to this groundbreaking work, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach in my review of Bonnin’s rhetorical record, pushing my analysis beyond feminist rhetorical recovery to considerations of Native American and American Indian Studies, as well as colonial studies and decolonial formations found within indigenous studies. As a non-Native scholar, I recognize that even though ethnic affiliation and ancestry need not be a litmus test for scholarly

authority, care should be taken when working within these later fields of inquiry. As Krista Ratcliffe notes in her review of recent historic rhetorical scholarship:

[F]ar too often in the past five hundred years, respect for the reality of American Indian cultures has been missing in dominant U.S. culture. Instead, there exists a history of romanticizing anything associated with American Indians, relegating such associations to the past, and collapsing myriad cultures into one. And in white academe, there exists a history of relegating American Indians to the status of objects of study rather than as subjects of their own scholarship and of defining Native concepts in terms of non-Native ones (Ratcliffe 200).<sup>35</sup>

Noting these concerns, informed researchers engaging in contemporary forms of inquiry designed to address history, story, rhetorical situation, positionality, context, and audience can “foster productive intersections” of rhetoric and Native American or American Indian Studies (200). One strong example is *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance* compiled and edited by Ernest Stromberg in 2006, but as Malea Powell highlights, there is an ongoing need for research in rhetoric and composition that continues to produce more historical recovery work with connections to Native American and American Indian Studies. Indeed, Powell observes that rhetoric and composition, as a discipline, has “done a pretty good job of not doing a very good job of critically engaging with Native texts” (“Rhetorics” 397).<sup>36</sup>

This project aims to extend Powell’s work on the “rhetorics of survivance” within composition and rhetoric. Drawing upon work by Gerald Vizenor, as discussed in more detail below, Powell uses this theoretical construct to recover early twentieth-century

rhetorical histories by closely reading texts produced by two of Bonnin's contemporaries, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Charles Eastman. Powell describes her scholarly efforts in the following manner: "I read the writings of the Native intellectuals rhetorically, listening for their use of popular nineteenth century notions about 'the Indian,' and listening for the ways in which they reimagine what it means to be Native after centuries of colonization, genocide, and assimilation. It is that reimagining that I mark as 'survivance,' and the tactics through which they enact that reimagining as 'rhetorics of survivance' (Interview, June 26, 2008).

My review of Bonnin's record builds upon this recovery process as identified by Powell to another twentieth-century figure and expands the zone of inquiry in several ways. First, I look to Powell's work on the "rhetorics of survivance" in conjunction with considerations of feminist theory and the indigenous theories outlined below in order to more fully assess the exigencies and constraints at issue for Bonnin as she worked from the speaker's podium. Second, I shift from a review of rhetorical production, as writing, to a much larger consideration of speech acts and the writing that subsequently memorialized these acts. Such a project enlarges existing forms of analysis and represents one answer to the call issued by Powell, Scott Lyons, and others, to continue to expand rhetorical inquiry and recovery, particularly within composition and rhetoric.

Indeed, Powell continues to emphasize the need for rhetoric and composition as a field to engage in more interdisciplinary scholarship. Her recent work seeks to expand our understanding of what she terms "Native Rhetorical Traditions" (Interview, Spring 2011). Following this line of inquiry, Powell examines the power of story as rhetorical theory and practice, and further explores tribal knowledges, values, and practices in order

to uncover and highlight “new ways of being in the world” (Interview, Spring 2011). As Powell explains,

[W]hat characterizes Native Rhetorical Traditions across tribes and across time is an orientation to *making* that is attuned to carrying traditional values and ideas forward, but that is not trapped under the mistaken anthropological notion that new materials make them somehow corrupt. So, for example, I’m looking at this Cherokee river cane basket-maker (Robin McBride Scott) who is practicing Cherokee cane traditions and I’ve learned a whole lot of very traditional things from her about a kind of rhetorical orientation to basket-making that ties the land and the body of the maker into a historical imaginary of Native people and Native makers all connected through those baskets . . . . This is what some people in the discipline would call an available means, or what I would call a practice of survivance, body, place, and culture as a triad around which Native Rhetorical Practices always circulate and constellate. (Interview, Spring 2011)

This study also seeks to push our current understanding of all “available means”<sup>37</sup> for engaging in rhetoric as a communicative practice. Specifically, this project examines survivance as articulated by Powell (and Vizenor) through body, place, and culture, attempting to enhance existing knowledge regarding the creation, circulation, and constellations of those rhetorical acts that we might call “Native Rhetorical Traditions.” To accomplish these aims, this project also moves beyond feminist rhetorical studies to incorporate more interdisciplinary constructs found within the field of indigenous studies.

### Indigenous Studies

Since 1999, when Linda Tuhiwai Smith first published *Decolonizing Methodologies*, more and more scholarly work within the field of Native American and American Indian Studies seeks to move beyond or away from traditional forms of analysis found within Western Eurocentric thought to embrace more indigenous forms of understanding and knowledge. In their leading article, “Being Indigenous,” Jeff Corntassel and Taiaiake Alfred provide a useful definition for the term *indigenous*:

Indigeness is an identity constructed, shaped, and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism. The communities, clans, nations, and tribes we call *Indigenous peoples* are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world.

There are, of course, vast differences among the world’s Indigenous peoples in their cultures, political-economic situations, and in their relationships with colonizing Settler societies. But the struggle to survive as distinct peoples on foundations constituted in their unique heritages, attachments to their homelands, and natural ways of life is what is shared by all Indigenous peoples, as well as the fact that their existence is in large

part lived as determined acts of survival against colonizing states' efforts to eradicate them culturally, politically and physically . . . .

Building on this notion of a dynamic and interconnected concept of Indigenous identity constituted in history, ceremony, language and land, we consider relationships (or kinship networks) to be at the core of an authentic Indigenous identity. (597, 609)

The terms *indigeneity* and *indigenous* affirm and extend Native community beyond singular, limiting associations with land rights or specific geographic locations. They also highlight the multiplicities of Native experience, the vast range of tribal contexts, experiences, knowledges, histories, and identities existing locally, regionally, and globally.

This project also seeks to analyze portions of Bonnin's rhetorical production through considerations of indigenous experience and knowledge. Frameworks of analysis derived from or based on indigenous ways of knowing, including tribal-specific worldviews, belief systems or practices, can begin to open up decolonialized spaces for inquiry and critical assessment.<sup>38</sup> As Linda Tuhiwai Smith observes, naming the world as "post" in *postcolonial* is, from indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business (99). Colonial disruptions of indigenous culture continued throughout Bonnin's lifetime and continue to this day; hegemony continues to occur within a largely white academy that tends to insist upon interpreting human experience solely through Western Eurocentric viewpoints.

While ongoing colonial constructions and practices must be openly acknowledged and addressed, the primacy of Western Eurocentric thought can be exposed, challenged,

and potentially reworked through decolonized forms of analysis designed to look more intentionally to indigenous ways of knowing. As noted above, Malea Powell consistently calls for scholars working within the field of rhetoric and composition to turn to “other ways of knowing” (“Ghosts” 12; “Stories” 393-394, 402-403). This kind of scholarly positioning remains critically important for at least a portion of this project on Bonnin—a woman who cherished her Yankton heritage and generally sought to create more liberatory forms of existence for all indigenous peoples. Given that the bulk of her rhetorical production between 1920 and 1925 focused on communicating with generally white audiences situated comfortably within dominant American culture, this project must intersect with Western Eurocentric thought as well to address both colonialism and Western Eurocentric forms of rhetoric—the genre which inevitably shaped and controlled Bonnin’s access to, and continuing use of, public speaking platforms. Nonetheless, while Bonnin certainly sought to find a voice within dominant culture, she simultaneously sought to maintain, if not advance, indigenous forms of identity, community, and culture. These maneuvers, the rhetorical strategies Bonnin developed, and the rhetorical choices Bonnin made, in order to engage in cross-cultural forms of articulation and expression may be more thoroughly identified and more fully examined through decolonial forms of review and analysis.

In order to apply a decolonial lens to portions of this project on Bonnin, I begin by looking to recent work by Penelope Kelsey on tribal theory and Gerald Vizenor’s work on the importance of oral tradition, as well as his conception of survivance. In her 2008 book, *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature*, Kelsey contends that tribal knowledges, epistemologies, and philosophies—whether visibly present or not—

influence articulations by indigenous voices, becoming vehicles for resurgence, resistance, and survival (1). Kelsey seeks to develop a decolonial means for considering the “Native cultural framework that Indigenous authors are constantly invoking, describing, engaging, and remaking in their writings and how this cultural and linguistic (re)tooling stands on its own as Indigenous theory” (10). In pursuit of this aim, Kelsey develops a set of interpretive strategies designed to “ground tribal texts in their specific backgrounds, histories, and cultures” (9).

Working as a literary scholar, Kelsey focuses primarily on textual production, but she intends for the tribal theory she develops to “travel,” becoming a useful critical tool within Native American literary studies writ large, if not part of a larger body of critical indigenous theory (10, 112-129). Most significantly for this inquiry, Kelsey applies her interpretive strategies to three Dakota writers, including Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. Beyond the usefulness of Kelsey’s decolonizing approach for language study, I look specifically to Kelsey’s reading of Bonnin’s autobiographical writing, and then extend this Dakota perspective as a critical lens for my work here. As a non-indigenous woman, I strive to engage in this project as an ally, rather than a dilettante, tourist, or poacher (Hafen, “Living to Tell Stories” at 30). Working carefully to create foundations of understanding through deliberate scholarship, I also continue to seek greater awareness of the political implications of my work. It will be imperative to consult with Native scholars and members of the Yankton or Ihanktonwan Dakota community in order to solicit appropriate review and identify appropriate means for “giving back” or sharing this information in useful ways with tribal members. I intend to address these considerations with members of my doctoral committee and incorporate this stage of



input and review as quickly as possible, and most certainly prior to any form of dissemination as publication. At this stage, I have reviewed Bonnin's moments of oration (and their textual artifacts) from Dakota perspectives as articulated in written texts by Kelsey, Ella C. Deloria, and Agnes C. Picotte, and then combined this critical lens with close reading to recover and reexamine Bonnin's record from the speaker's platform as an indigenous activist.

Beyond incorporating theoretical frameworks that embrace Dakota tribal knowledge, this project also adopts additional indigenous methodologies, notably notions of story and survivance as articulated in the work of Gerald Vizenor. One of the most heralded figures in Native American Studies, Vizenor's work has been called "the most theoretically sophisticated and informed to date" (Warrior, *Tribal Secrets* xviii). Writing in 2009, Gordon Henry Jr. notes, "Over the years Vizenor's creative use of theory and his intellectual presence have recast academic discourse on American Indian literature at almost every turn" (*Stories Through Theories* 2-3). Deborah Madsen also asserts within her critical review from 2009 that Vizenor "is a highly influential intellectual who has redefined the field of Native American Studies," and a notable scholar who uses "the writings of Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and others of the poststructuralist school of thought, . . . to (serve) the interests of bringing tribal epistemologies to a contemporary readership" (8, 23). While Kelsey argues that Vizenor's work is "notably dated by its reliance postmodern and poststructuralist theory" (3), this view does not prevail and continues to be challenged or specifically critiqued in scholarly reviews affirming the relevance and the importance of Vizenor's work. Vizenor's scholarship remains closely identified with indigeneity and indigenous critical

theory.<sup>39</sup> As a noted essayist, dramatist, poet, fiction writer, and literary scholar, Vizenor emphasizes the importance of story and oral tradition as well as survivance and the semiotic deconstruction of cultural terms such as “Indian” or “Indianness.”<sup>40</sup> His extensive, profound work influences scholarship in many disciplines, including composition and rhetoric.

To take up considerations of Vizenor’s critical frameworks is to begin with story, with indigenous forms of oral tradition. In her 1996 review of Vizenor’s work, *Writing in the Oral Tradition*, Kim Blaeser observes that Vizenor values Native American oral tradition because “tribal words have power in the oral tradition”—indeed, most tribal cultures have a great reverence for language, believing in the power of words to affect reality, to bring about, to create (17, 199). Due in part to this emphasis by Vizenor (and many others), an understanding of story as theory and method of inquiry continues to grow within, and certainly beyond, communities of scholars primarily interested in indigenous concerns.<sup>41</sup>

In her book, *Indigenous Methodologies*, Margaret Kovach refers to the methodology of story as decolonizing research, but she cautions scholars engaging with tribal stories to work carefully and respectfully in order to understand their form, purpose, and substance from tribal perspectives, attending mindfully to inevitable differences between oral renderings and textual reproductions (99-101). In an effort to address some of these concerns as articulated by Kovatch, I look to Jane Hafen’s essay, “Living to Tell Stories” and her discussion of a methodology for establishing tribal context drawn primarily from LeAnne Howe’s notion of “tribalography.”<sup>42</sup> As Howe describes,

Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, history), seem to pull all of the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning of the people, the land and multiple characters and all of their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus. (Howe 42)

Portions of the ensuing analysis on Bonnin will examine Dakota stories and storytelling traditions in this fashion, pulling together elements of the people, the land, and multiple characters, connecting all of these manifestations and revelations to enhanced, more nuanced readings of Bonnin's multivalent rhetorical production.

For the remainder of this project, I apply methods of story or view Bonnin's acts of storying and self-narration in conjunction with the theoretical constructs of survivance and presence or absence as articulated by Vizenor. Combining an emphasis on story and oral tradition with notions of survival and resistance, Vizenor often seeks through his own critical work to promote "survivance," defined loosely as a way of thinking and acting in the world that refuses domination and the position of the victim (Blaeser 38-71; Madsen 33). Writing in 1998, Vizenor observes, "[S]urvivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence. . . .survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (*Fugitive Poses* 15).

Theoretical conceptions of survivance look to both Native lived experience and Western Eurocentric thought for interpretation and analysis. As Blaeser observes, "Vizenor discovered in contemporary theories about metaphor, the play of difference, the utterance, . . . philosophies and intentions similar to his own tribally based ideas and [he]

imaginatively incorporated the theories and methods into his own chameleonlike (or tricksterlike) creations” (34). As outlined above, for Vizenor, the destiny of Native peoples rests with story, tradition, and language. Vizenor believes Native peoples will “survive or ‘vanish’ through the merits of language: survive through tribal oral tradition, or be made to vanish through popular, scientific, literary, and political rhetoric” (Blaeser 39). Intimately connected to Vizenor’s thoughts regarding survival is his emphasis on the need to engage in linguistic resistance—“to expose, remove, relocate, and rewrite the sign, ‘Indian,’ . . . deconstructing the false rhetoric surrounding ‘Indianness’” (39-40).

Employing a Derridean understanding of *différance* with attendant conceptions of presence and absence, Vizenor explains in *Fugitive Poses* how he believes Native peoples become “othered” and rendered absent through false simulations of presence that are created through prevailing colonial discourses of the “Indian” or “Indianness.” These limiting discourses generally define Native peoples as “savage,” “uncivilized,” “vanishing,” or “exotic,” and often further associate a romanticized “lost past” to Native communities in unstable but popular cultural fantasies designed to counter the sweeping forces of urbanization and industrialization concomitant with both modern and postmodern existence. These false and very fixed perceptions cast actual Native experience as an absence. Thus, as Blaeser explains, Vizenor “identifies the most dangerous threat to the survival of tribal people as the gradual insinuation into their lives of Indian stereotypes” (41). These essentializing stereotypes—as false simulations assumed to be real—require perceptions of Native peoples that assume static forms of identity, restrict Native peoples to second-class status as marginalized others, and threaten the survival of authentic tribal realities.

Just as Derrida sought to deconstruct binary assumptions and absolute forms of thinking, Vizenor goes on to challenge the relationship between presence and absence that threatens Native experience. When we contemplate “presence” or “absence” as advanced by Derrida or Vizenor, we may instinctively think that something is either here, or not here, but we also recognize that the absence of something can leave a trace, or “traces” of its presence. We often further comprehend that something can be present while being partially absent. From these perceptions, Vizenor concludes that Native selves, to avoid becoming *indian* or “Indian”<sup>43</sup> selves, can and must become “stories, traces of [alternate] discourse, and the tease of presence” (*Fugitive Poses* 20).

I use this critical framework of “presence and absence” to both identify and analyze key discursive moments for Bonnin between 1920 and 1925. That is to say, during her most active decade on the speaker’s platform, I argue that Bonnin, as a rhetor who sought to engage in indigenous forms of activism, played continually with legibility, subjectivity, and identity, in and through notions of presence and absence as articulated by Vizenor. The following chapters seek to demonstrate how Bonnin used story to infuse contemporaneous experience with native presence and simultaneously invoke traces of alternate, more liberatory discourses as a public speaker, even as she ironically played to type through a kind of absence as the “Indian” figure her audiences frequently expected to encounter. Her success as a rhetor can be attributed in large part to her ability to engage in these fluid, multivalent, cross-cultural rhetorical maneuvers.

Chapter Two examines Bonnin’s recitation of her “Dacotah Ode to Washington” during a civic ceremony held within the Washington Monument on June 22, 1922 examining how she managed to meet traditional expectations for ritual and performance

as *epideixis*, but simultaneously rework this rhetorical moment as a site of pointed, if not subversive, socio-cultural critique. By engaging in the crafting of story, by invoking traces of Dakota cultural discourses regarding honor, service, and community, and by working to ensure the assertion of an indigenous presence within official recordings of this event, Bonnin called her intended audiences to engage more meaningfully with native presence. This chapter questions the actual effect of such an oration and subsequently explores how this speech act might function through polyvocality and reinscription in national sites of archive and memory as a permanent, troubling crease within ongoing, official discourses of power and dominance.

Chapter Three argues that by carefully linking “Indian” concerns to prevailing discourses of Americanization, Bonnin helped to create a new discourse of interest and engagement which subsequently led many women’s club members to engage in limited forms of indigenous activism. While this largely female-driven crusade to “Americanize the First American” clearly reinforced notions of native absence and erasure, it simultaneously refigured dominant discourses of Americanization with meaningful traces of native presence, nationally, regionally, and locally. Expanding upon notions of collaboration, linkage, and networked connection, this chapter rethinks presence and absence in and through an exploration of *ethos* as authority and legibility within environments hostile to certain forms of rhetorical production. Building upon Lindal Buchanan’s work on collaborative feminist rhetorics, this discussion also moves from considerations of Bonnin as an individual rhetor to a larger exploration of the moments of rhetorical “presence and absence” or the locus of effects—as traces of native presence—

Bonnin's speech act may have initiated or facilitated for many voices across multiple discourse communities.

Overall, this project carefully reviews key moments found within Bonnini's early twentieth-century efforts to advance indigenous concerns, particularly her use of oration and oratory performance, in order to provide scholars with an opportunity to expand existing notions of rhetoric. Recovering and reexamining these orations by Bonnini allows scholars of history and rhetoric to reconsider specific Western Eurocentric rhetorical concepts—particularly *epideixis* and *ethos*—from enlarged and interdisciplinary, if not more complex perspectives. This kind of inquiry enriches our understanding of Western Eurocentric forms of rhetorical production through expanded notions of fluidity and multiplicity, extending and enhancing considerations of agency, identity, subjectivity, and polyvocality within the field of rhetoric and composition. This kind of interdisciplinary inquiry also highlights alternate forms of rhetoric as tradition and practice beyond Western Eurocentric constructs through its considerations of Dakota story and storytelling as invoked and deployed by Bonnini. And certainly, as we (re) tell (new) stories of rhetoric, as we (re) tell (new) stories of presence, who knows what else might be unearthed, unveiled, uncovered, revealed—indeed, recovered and then retold?

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. *Fugitive Poses* at 20. Throughout this manuscript, I seek to both explain and enact notions of trace and native presence as emphasized by Vizenor, and others. To this end, I include a pictograph within each chapter and repeat this pictograph in most of the headings found within each chapter as a means for disrupting closure, binaries, and hierarchical formations often embedded within alphabetic text. The pictograph appearing throughout this first chapter is the symbol of a circle enveloping two crossed lines. In Sioux belief systems, a circle represents continuing cycles of communal existence, while intersecting lines represent paths of individual experience. I have chosen to use this symbol throughout this first chapter in order to highlight Bonnin's extensive linguistic abilities forged from more than one cultural tradition and her ongoing commitment to community as a life-long advocate and activist.

2. See, Johnson and Wilson 34; Maddox 152-154; Petersen 163-164; Sonneborn 14.

3. Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Bonnin), undated personal history (hereinafter "Personal History" at 1).

4. Vital Statistics from *Iayi Oaye*, May 5, 1876.

5. There is some confusion in the literature regarding Gertrude's paternity. Susan Dominguez asserts that Táte I Yóhin Win first married Pierre St. Pierre and then married John Haysting Simmons (Dominguez viii). See also, Yankton Land Claim files, Record Group No. 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C. While Dominguez states that John Haysting Simmons was Gertrude's father, many contemporary reviewers believe that Gertrude's father was actually William Felker, a man who left the Yankton area before



her birth in February of 1876. The local community paper, *Iayi Oaye*, references a marriage ceremony between “Mrs. Fanny Simmons” and William Felker on May 23, 1875. In current scholarship, Felker is referred to as “white,” “French American” and a “trader” (Hafen, “Indian Cause” at 127-128; Sonneborn 12; Spack 43). Biographer Doreen Rappaport also asserts that Bonnin was the ninth child born to Táte I Yóhin Win and that at the time of her birth, there were only four surviving older half-siblings: Peter, Edward, and Henry St. Pierre, and David Simmons (169).

6. This manuscript addresses early twentieth-century contexts and seeks to be deeply immersed within this earlier historical period. Consequently, this text does not generally reference tribal affiliations for historical figures and, for the sake of consistency, extends that choice to contemporary scholars referenced here as well, even though there is wide agreement that it is most appropriate to use naming practices which reference specific tribal affiliations for Native individuals. Despite this stylistic choice, this scholarship remains committed to affording respect and marking critical distinctions within Native experience.

7. See generally, Hafen, “Dreams” and Picotte. As Hafen explains: “Bonnin’s Yankton upbringing probably meant that she learned the Nakota dialect . . . (and) her writings are in . . . Dakota, likely because of the influence of Stephen Return Riggs’s early Dakota dictionary and orthographics for the spoken language or because the Yankton groups also spoke Dakota” (xiv).

8. Consequently, I refer most frequently throughout this text to Bonnin by the Euro-American version of her married name because this is the name most often associated with the rhetorical moments I examine. I concede that any attempt at naming

is quite unstable, for as Bonnin herself evidences, one named entity can easily be replaced by or slide into another, depending upon the situation and the communicative aims of that instance. As I argue in later sections of this manuscript, when working as a public advocate, Bonnin deliberately shifted her identity, her figural presentation, her linguistic forms of expression, and her medium of address depending upon available access to particular discursive forums, the perceived needs or desires of her intended audiences, and her often multi-layered purposes for a given address.

9. Scholars estimate this slaughter, through warfare, internment, and disease, resulted in at least twenty million Native deaths within the territorial borders of the United States. See generally, Dobyns and Thornton. The federal census report from 1920 lists the total American Indian population at 244,437. Note that Bonnin is born just six months before the Sioux and Cheyenne defeat General George Custer and his troops at the Battle of Greasy Grass or Little Bighorn, Montana in June of 1876, a time historian Deborah Welch labels as “the height of nineteenth-century Indian-Anglo conflict on the Great Plains” (1).

10. For a more complete discussion of the Native American boarding school experience during this era, see generally, Lomawaima et al. and Child.

11. Zitkala Ša, “The Snow Episode” in *American Indian Stories* at 59.

12. See generally, Bonnin’s autobiographical writing in *Old Indian Legends*, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” “An Indian Teacher Among Indians” and “The School Days of an Indian Girl” as well as critical analysis by (Ron) Carpenter, Davidson and Norris, Enoch, and others.

13. In addition to her mastery of Native American languages and English, Bonnin also translated indigenous narratives into Latin during her time at Earlham College.

14. Bonnin also traveled with the Carlisle Band to perform in Europe during this period. See, Hoefel and Spack, "Captivity Tale."

15. The SAI is often identified as the first national Pan-Indian organization. See Hoxie, Hertzberg.

16. Personal History, "1902 to 1932 Activities" at 3. See also, Welch 101-102, where this move is discussed in greater detail.

17. Personal History, "1902 to 1932 Activities" at 5. See also, Davidson and Norris xxi; Wells 217-18.

18. During the era of Indian Allotment (1887-1934) controlled by the Dawes Act, approximately two-thirds of all Indian landholdings in the continental United States (more than 86 million acres), were lost. Events at the Yankton Agency followed a similar pattern. In 1887 the Yanktons held 431,000 acres of land; by 1934 they held less than 50,000 acres (Maroukis 59-60).

19. See e.g., Gertrude Bonnin, "Editorial Comment" at 113-114. While suffragists had secured full voting rights for women by 1920, many Native Americans continued to live under ward status, and did not secure similar rights until 1924, with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act. For more background on Bonnin's role as an "activist" editor, see Cox.

20. Captain Bonnin did not go overseas, but served in "various Southern camps" and their home city of Washington. Bonnin, "Personal History" at 3.

21. Letter to Montezuma, June 26, 1919.

22. See generally, Spack, *Second Tongue*, 61-68.

23. *The Earlhamite*, Vol. 2, February 15, 1896: 157-158.

24. The full texts of both speeches appear in the Appendix. While beyond the scope of this project, there is a need for more scholarly work focused specifically upon the differences between each speech, and the socio-linguistic forms of resistance Bonnin designed and enacted in and through these platforms, particularly within her second speech for the state-wide audience assembled in Indianapolis.

25. “Cheers,” *The Earlhamite*, at 187. While this characterization, as Barbara Chiarello and Ruth Spack note, “smacks of condescension,” it also evidences Bonnin’s oral language proficiency (“Translation Moves” 59).

26. See generally, Cox, Hafen, Enoch, Wilkinson, and Newmark.

27. Existing scholarly work by Spack and Chiarello on Bonnin’s early public speaking during her time at Earlham is only undertaken within the context of larger literary analyses, and no critical work to date, that I am aware of, focuses specifically on Bonnin’s use of the speaker’s platform during her time at White’s Institute, Santee Normal School, Carlisle Industrial School, and beyond.

28. See generally, Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. See also, Cook-Lynn’s collection of essays dedicated to “the indigenous writer in the modern world” which addresses the need for decolonial, pro-sovereignty approaches within Native American Studies.

29. The globalized forms of inquiry associated with indigenous studies locate this scholarship both within and beyond American Indian or Native American Studies.

30. These rhetorical constructs will be explained more fully in later chapters of this text.

31. See generally, Biesecker, “Coming to Terms,” which argues that the recovery of individual female figures mimics mainstream paradigms and reinforces elitist hierarchies. I contend, like Campbell, that both the recovery of single voices and other, more expansive forms of scholarship are essential for establishing a feminist canon.

32. This accepted form of qualitative research originates with anthropologist Clifford Geertz and continues to be recommended for archival work in rhetoric and composition. See, Gaillet 41-44.

33. All of my scholarly efforts continue to be shaped by the “lines of accountability” for feminist rhetorical scholarship as articulated by Jacqueline Jones Royster. While Royster refers to this “way of doing” as “Afrafeminist” scholarship, the field of rhetoric and composition recognizes that Royster’s work extends to marginalized rhetors—speakers marked multiply by gender and race, more generally, offering a thoughtful, insightful means for considering the ethical, social, and political implications of our work as feminist researchers (Schell and Rawson 4). Royster explains her methodology in the following manner:

This approach embodies the notion that mind, heart, body, and soul operate collectively and requires intellectual work to include four sites of critical regard: *careful analysis, acknowledgment of passionate attachments, attention to ethical action, and commit to social responsibility*. From my perspective, these sites operate together to create a well-functioning whole with each site involving practices forged in light

of critical ways of doing that are also touchstones for critical ways of being. (*Traces of a Stream* 279)

34. See also, Foss, Griffin and Foss, “Transforming Rhetoric” arguing that exposure to alternative perspectives may very well serve as catalyst for change (123).

35. Native literature and language scholar P. Jane Hafen also notes that “academic training analogous to any other field is necessary, perhaps even more so, because the ethical stakes are higher when dealing with indigenous peoples, with ideas about us, and with the five hundred year history of colonialism” (“Living to Tell Stories” 28).

36. Additional areas for future research within this intersection, as identified by Powell, include: (1) American Indians and the Web; (2) more bridging of the rhetorics-poetic divide; (3) material culture and nonalphabetic texts; and (4) popular culture in relation to American Indians (Ratcliffe 200). See also, Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty.”

37. Powell references Aristotle’s famous definition of rhetoric as the “discovery of all available means of persuasion” (37-38). In their foundational text, *Available Means*, feminist rhetorical scholars Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald appropriate Aristotle’s definition, noting for that for marginalized rhetors, particularly women, the making or crafting of a rhetorical message, as invention, “begins in a very different place from Aristotle’s conception of invention: Women must first invent a way to speak in the context of being rendered silent and invisible as persons” (xvii).

38. Tuhiwai Smith 116; Corntassel and Alfred 615. Looking to Margaret Kovach’s work in *Indigenous Methodologies*, I use the terms “indigenous” and “tribal”

interchangeably throughout this project when referencing communal knowledge(s), belief or value systems, world views, philosophies, or epistemologies (20).

39. See the Gordon Henry, Jr. critique of Kelsey's view in *Stories Through Theories* at 3; see also, Blaeser, Breinig, Byrd, Kovach, and Powell, "X-Blood Files."

40. As Deborah Madsen outlines, "his efforts to deconstruct the notion of 'the Indian' as a colonial imposition that bears no relation to the tribal identities of real Native people has . . . [inaugurated] an important conversation about what the concept of 'Indian' means and how the culture of American 'Indians' should be studied" (18). See also, Blaeser, Deloria, and Powell.

41. As Malea Powell observes, "storytelling isn't just an "Indian' thing for me; it is essential in the creation all human realities" ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 429).

42. Hafen, "Living to Tell Stories" 30-31.

43. To draw attention to the constructed, anomalous nature of the word "Indian," Vizenor always writes "*indian*" in lowercase and italicized. He coins the term "postindian" to define the period of time since Columbus' invention of the American "Indian" during which all people named "Indians" are more properly "postindians." In his essay "American Revolutions: Transethnic Cultures and Narratives," Vizenor explains: "The word *indian* is a convenient word, a misnomer to be sure, but it is an invented name that does not come from any native language, and does not describe or contain any aspects of traditional tribal experience" (*Literary Chance* 120).

## CHAPTER TWO

### TELLING STORY, REFIGURING CEREMONY A DACOTAH ODE TO WASHINGTON, TRACES OF DISCOURSE, AND THE RHETORICAL POWER OF PRESENCE AS ABSENCE

--“Be it so. *Hecetu* ...Long live the eagle principles...inculcated in the hearts and minds of the people....”

Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, “Dacotah Ode,” June 1922 <sup>1</sup>

After moving to Washington D.C. in 1917, Gertrude Simmons Bonnin engaged in the most politically active, most publicly-oriented phase of her life. Beyond serving as Secretary and Editor for the Society of American Indians (the SAI”), she frequently testified before legislative committees and almost always accepted invitations (nationally, regionally, and locally) to appear as a speaker and lecturer for the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and the Pen Women’s League. By the spring of 1922, as federal employees planned a brief ceremony to honor the installation of a commemorative stone for the State of South Dakota within the base of the Washington Monument, it would have been natural to ask “Mrs. Bonnin”—a well-established public figure within the city of Washington, if not nationally—to perform a key ceremonial role. Bonnin’s participation in this government-sponsored event presented her with an opportunity to engage in epideictic—a ceremonial form of rhetoric traditionally associated with affirming, upholding, and celebrating dominant culture. Bonnin did indeed appear at the base of the Washington Monument on June 22 and fulfill her assigned role as perhaps a token “Indian” figure, but she also simultaneously reworked this rhetorical moment into a site of pointed, if not subversive, socio-cultural critique, leaving a clear record of her rhetorical performance for later generations to (re) discover.



This chapter will first review the rhetorical functions of *epideixis* as ceremonial speech, and then outline events leading up to Bonnin's recitation of a "Dacotah Ode"<sup>2</sup> at the base of the Washington Monument on June 22. The chapter will conclude with a close review of Bonnin's actual speech and an examination of its later effects. Arguably, by engaging in the crafting of story, by invoking traces of Dakota cultural discourses regarding honor, service, and community, and by working to ensure the assertion of an indigenous presence within official recordings of this event, Bonnin called her intended audiences to engage more meaningfully with native presence. The rhetorical strategies Bonnin employed within this particular speech delivered on June 22, 1922 allowed her to reconstitute the form of a classical ode with the presence of native story and specifically reclaim the figure of the eagle as a sacred totem in both Dakota and Euro-Western cultures. Through these rhetorical maneuvers, Bonnin disrupted prevailing, contemporaneous discourses of "Indianness" as a national fantasy of absence and erasure. By appearing as the "Indian" figure her audience expected her to be, and by playing to type, Bonnin managed to gain access to a public platform which provided her with more meaningful opportunities to challenge dominant views of "Indianness." Her speech both articulates and disarticulates (or resists) "Indianness," ultimately becoming an assertion of native presence designed to challenge prevailing views of native absence that continued (and continue) to shape dominant versions of American history, memory, and archive.

## The Genre of Epideictic Ceremony, Communal Values, Social Critique

The term *epideixis* or “epideictic” originates with Aristotle, who sought to elevate rhetoric as a public art and systematically classify its components. Aristotle identified three types of public discourse within classical rhetoric—deliberative (political or legislative speech), judicial (“of the courts” or forensic speech), and epideictic. This last genre, epideictic, functioned expansively, in Aristotle’s view, as a particular kind of discourse that: (1) occurred as part of a ceremonial occasion; (2) featured a display of rhetorical skill or technique; and (3) focused in some way on praise or blame (Aristotle 46-51; Jasinski, *Sourcebook* 210). The *encomium*, a ceremony associated with public display and the dedication of statues depicting celebrated civic figures, as well as funeral speeches, and *panegyrics*, or festival orations came to be most closely associated with Ancient Greek forms of epideictic (Aristotle 85–86). For centuries, treatises on Western Eurocentric forms of rhetoric continued to follow Aristotle’s categorizations, and over time, the form expanded to include inaugural ceremonies, graduation speeches, keynote addresses, and civic dedications, to name just a few examples found within more contemporary forms of epideictic.

Despite its general association with ceremony, epideictic does not function as a stable or fixed concept within Eurowestern fields of rhetoric. Contemporary scholar James Jasinski notes that epideictic “has been the subject of considerable conceptual discussion and theoretical speculation over the centuries . . . (and) conceptual reflection on the category of epideictic discourse was especially intense during the latter half of the twentieth century” (*Sourcebook*, 210-211). These scholarly debates have led to an understanding that epideictic discourse, as ceremony, usually reinforces an adherence to

certain dominant values,<sup>3</sup> but also holds the potential to reshape or refigure these same conceptions through connections to performance and performativity—a critical moment of social encounter where perceptions can shift or be shifted.<sup>4</sup> In current rhetorical scholarship, as Jasinski states, “[t]he . . . function of epideictic is to reveal or disclose something—to bring new truths out into the open—rather than . . . reinforce existing values” (211).

Building upon this contemporary understanding, Jasinski links epideictic to Lloyd Bitzer’s well-accepted view that every rhetorical situation is shaped by some type of exigence. Viewing exigence as communal issues or communal problems, Jasinski asserts that epideictic functions in the modern world as a means for addressing exigence in order to generate, sustain, or modify communal existence. Certainly, the epideictic genre poses enduring questions about communal values and how these values might bring or hold communities together (Danisch 300). Epideictic can also provide an opportunity for public forms of inquiry into conflicts and struggles over the contestation of specific communal values, even though this use of epideictic has been greatly undertheorized.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, for modern audiences, the epideictic form reveals or discloses new information that can both confirm and uphold—or trouble and disrupt—communal concerns. Speakers engaging in epideictic discourse define, affirm, clarify, or challenge the core values initially (or potentially) destabilized by exigencies occurring within particular communities.

Substantively, epideictic discourse focuses on the present in order to address contemporaneous concerns for communities. However, in order to unify particular communities more effectively, epideictic speech often praises past actions in order to

celebrate “timeless virtues and inculcate them as models for the future” (Richards 7; Aristotle 48; Ray 185). Seeking to understand the ability of epideictic speech to influence or persuade particular audiences, Celeste Condit posits that to address communal core values, epideictic speech also incorporates one or more of the following characteristics related to audience-specific concerns: (1) provides definition and understanding; (2) engages in information shaping and sharing; and (3) offers display and entertainment. In her review of the Boston Massacre Orations presented annually between 1771 and 1783, Condit illustrates how ceremonial addresses can incorporate these three specific, audience-focused functions. Pre-dating the famous “Boston Tea Party,” the Boston “Massacre” occurred on March 5, 1770 as British soldiers killed five civilian men and injured six others. Designed to commemorate these limited, but confusing deaths, the annual orations helped to clarify the pre-Revolutionary War threat posed by British rule, and worked to shape an “official” history for a burgeoning nation. Colonial orators also delivered these performances with eloquence and flair, creating interest in, if not support for, dominant interpretations of the initial event. Condit’s example provides a glimpse of epideictic as it defines, affirms, and clarifies prevailing, widely accepted core values, but her example does not provide a clear view of epideictic as it works more surreptitiously through ceremony to disrupt or challenge core values shared by the dominant community.

Recent scholarship examining epideictic as a venue or platform for speakers hoping to trouble, challenge, or disrupt existing community practices, particularly with respect to race relations, is limited but includes James Jasinski’s review of Frederick Douglass’s 1852 speech, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July to the Negro,” Michael Leff’s discussion of Frederick Douglass’s 1876 memorial for President Lincoln, William

D. Harpine's analysis of African American speeches during McKinley's 1896 Front Porch Campaign, Robert Danisch's essay addressing the writings of Alain Locke, and Cindy Koenig Richards' examination of speeches given by local women from Portland, Oregon in 1905 during ceremonies marking the installation of a statute representing Sacajawea. Each of these scholars remind us that when ceremonial forms of speech become a platform for social critique, the genre of epideictic must be strategically deployed to subvert some elements of the existing social order, while affirming others. Leff and Jasinski, in particular, highlight the ironic, paradoxical tension many epideictic speakers must negotiate if they wish to undertake social critique, particularly related to prevailing notions of race. Working through engaging forms of display and entertainment, these speakers must both define, explain, or share widely accepted forms of information and simultaneously attempt to introduce new, if not more challenging perspectives.

Recognizing this paradox, when read together, these five texts establish means for expanding epideictic as a site for critique and for challenging dominant socio-cultural formations through the following rhetorical maneuvers: (1) the use of ambiguity; (2) "enlarged" or "amplified" forms of praise as speech which simultaneously critiques, or reworks, then instructs; and (3) enhanced or extended uses of metaphor to refigure common meaning and understanding.

For example, in his careful examination of Frederick Douglass's oratory style, Leff notes that Douglass frequently turned standard expectations for praise into more ambiguous statements. This strategy created opportunities for Douglass's audiences to engage more subtlety in open-ended forms of contemplation and judgment. Noting how

Douglass delivered the main speech at an unveiling ceremony in 1876 for a monument commissioned by black citizens to honor Lincoln as “The Great Emancipator,” Leff notes that Douglass’s opening sentence thanked his audience for assembling before such a “highly interesting object.”<sup>6</sup> As Leff explains, Douglass thought the monument depicted kneeling freed slaves inappropriately, that they should have been represented through statuary in a less obsequious position. Consequently, as Leff notes, “Douglass had to define the situation to suit his own purposes. He needed to establish his primary objective not as praise of Lincoln, but (as) an act of memorialization accomplished by black citizens” (142-143). With his ambiguous opening, Douglass arguably deflected attention away from the monument and what it represented in order to focus upon a “less tangible purpose” (143). Beyond his concerns with genuflection, Douglass believed the statue erroneously honored a former President who did not fully recognize African Americans as citizens (143). Thus, Douglass found that his less than tangible purpose—his critique—needed to be developed as a meta-discourse, as a new perspective that Douglass constructed which presented an “enlarged” view of Lincoln as a man constrained by historical circumstances (Leff 144- 145). This rhetorical maneuver, honoring Lincoln for accomplishing what could be done under limited circumstances, allowed African American members of Douglass’s audience to express gratitude to Lincoln, at that moment, but still maintain a sense of personal integrity. Through the “enlarged” view of Lincoln created through Douglass’s speech, African Americans now honored Lincoln for his “limited” accomplishments.

Similarly, William Harpine’s work on the Front Porch Orations of 1896 highlights how African American speakers used standard forms of praise to remind McKinley of his

commitment to more humane forms of public policy. Their speeches of greeting both honored McKinley and simultaneously reminded the future President that he would need to be a “friend, champion, and protector” who would value liberty, justice, and equal voting rights during his time in Washington—the height of the nation’s Jim Crow era (47-50). This rhetorical maneuver “enlarges” the zone of praise and honor to include a pointed reminder to McKinley to protect and watch over minority interests and concerns.

Beyond deploying ambiguity and expanded, more pointed forms of praise, Danisch, Richards, and Jasinski all draw attention to the use of metaphor as yet another means for challenging and refiguring dominant social perceptions. Jasinski’s discussion of Douglass’s 1852 oration explains how Douglass subverts at least one standard metaphor, the “nation as a person (that ages)” to challenge prevailing socio-cultural views. Douglass reconfigures this metaphor in his 1852 speech to claim that the nation is not mature, but “still lingering in the period of childhood” (Jasinski 80). This metaphorical shift opens up new possibilities for Douglass as speaker to articulate more radical possibilities for a nation’s political terrain now redefined as nascent. In Douglass’s case, this strategy reminded an audience, as they celebrated the Fourth of July, that a “young” nation’s revolution needed to continue in order to achieve full equality—that its original visions of freedom and democracy had not yet been fully realized for all.

Robert Danisch further argues that Alain Locke’s writing in *The New Negro*, as a form of public address, highlights how amplification, when used as rhetorical tool for “enlarging” dominant ideologies, can be used effectively through the genre of epideictic to address racial conflict. Danisch believes Locke’s writing amplified or highlighted

overlooked forms of artistic production growing out of the Harlem Renaissance and attempted to instruct dominant audiences about the value of this art for American culture. These strategies, in Danisch's view, helped Locke encourage his audience to embrace alternate visions of American society, visions based on a pluralist democracy, and broader, expanded forms of cross-cultural conversation, collaboration, and negotiation (305). Danisch goes on to argue that "race is a necessary *topos* for epideictic rhetoric to negotiate because it is an integral part of group identity and value systems"—indeed, "it helps us to understand one another while maintaining an open-ended tolerance for change, plurality, and revision" (312).


Similarly in her article on the 1905 commemoration of a statute designed to honor Sacajawea, Cindy Koenig Richards argues that the epideictic form also allowed early twentieth-century female speakers and their audiences to imagine and envision alternate public norms related to race and gender. During the 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, as a statute of Sacajawea was unveiled, local women engaged in a series of speeches to honor her as "the embodiment of American values and achievement" (2). Richards argues that certain rhetorical maneuvers allowed these women to subvert some traditional prejudices and practices even as they simultaneously supported and upheld others.<sup>7</sup> These rhetorical strategies included using ambiguity and amplification to emphasize key civic leadership roles undertaken by Sacajawea and other local women that had traditionally been associated with men. Richards argues that this process of redefinition, explanation, and information sharing through amplification and "enlarged" forms of praise—like earlier rhetorical maneuvers undertaken by Douglass and the Front



Porch Orators—allowed these local speakers to shift the event from its focus on one female figure to the countless deeds of many women.

In sum, recent scholarship examining the genre of epideictic as a platform for social critique highlights the paradoxical nature of such an endeavor and the importance of engaging in a kind of multi-voiced construction. Certainly epideictic speech must appear at first blush to celebrate the status quo, to advance forms of praise (or blame), and to display and entertain, as engaging spectacle. But rhetors seeking to challenge or resist through epideictic must simultaneously find an acceptable, effective way to trouble existing audience perceptions. Drawing upon the analyses outlined above, it appears that recognized tools to achieve this kind of rhetorical maneuvering include ambiguity, amplification or enlarged forms of praise, and the reworking of widely accepted metaphors in order to expand audience perceptions and lead audiences to embrace alternate, and perhaps more inclusive visions for civic life.

The remaining sections of this chapter examine Bonnin's ability to negotiate the paradox she encountered on June 22, 1922 as she was asked to honor and praise a history of settler colonialism that had destroyed her homeland and continued to threaten her tribal community.<sup>8</sup> The ensuing discussion will review Bonnin's use of ambiguity, amplification, and metaphor through story to shift her audience's limited perceptions of "Indianness" as absence to forms of native presence in order to challenge and expand prevailing narratives of empire related history, memory, and communal identity.

Mrs. Bonnin as Ceremonial Figure  “Would You Tell Folk-Stories in Costume?”

While many personal and business records from this period in Bonnin’s life have been lost or destroyed,<sup>9</sup> at least one remaining letter gives us some insight into the invitation process that Bonnin often experienced during her time in Washington and may illuminate how Bonnin came to speak at the installation ceremony held within the Washington Monument on June 22, 1922. A surviving letter from Library of Congress Reading Room Assistant Alberta Weaver addressed to “My dear Mrs. Bonnin” extends the following invitation:

Mr. William A. Miller of the Copyright Office, Library of Congress needs some on (sic) to present the Indian side at some gathering at the Mayflower on December 15<sup>th</sup> and requested me through a mutual friend to find out if you would tell some folk-stories in costume for him?<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary audiences might perceive the tone and language of Alberta Weaver’s note to be insulting or degrading, but Bonnin viewed every speaking engagement as a critical opportunity for enhancing awareness and education regarding Native concerns, and she graciously accepted Weaver’s invitation.<sup>11</sup> While Bonnin often appeared in Native dress or “in costume” [See Figure 4] she strove to deliver a more complex message. Indeed, as Lavina Engle of the Maryland League of Voters states in another letter to Mrs. Bonnin which survives from this period: “On behalf of the members of our organization I want to thank you for the very interesting address you made at our State Convention. I feel sure that all who heard you will have much deeper interest in the problem of Indian affairs than ever before.”<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 5. Bonnin, *Washington Post*, ca. 1918.

Certainly for official functions needing to window-dress with an “Indian” presence, Bonnin may have been one of the first available, local individuals asked to fulfill this function. Her reputation as a storyteller (well established after her publication of *Old Indian Legends* in 1901, and her subsequent publication of *American Indian Stories* in 1921), her national recognition due to her prominent role within the SAI, and her visibility within elite circles of the Washington community would all serve to make her the logical choice for a routine ceremonial event.

As Cari Carpenter notes in her article, “Detecting Indianness,” Bonnin was well aware of the dangers of wearing “Indian” attire that reinforced non-Native impressions of American Indians. In a letter to Arthur Parker (then President of SAI) dated March 2, 1917, Bonnin mentions that she has been asked by the Women’s Temperance Society to give a piano solo “all in Indian dress.” As she explained, “I have agreed, for in this case the use of Indian dress for a drawing card is a good cause...(e)ven a clown has to dress differently from his usual citizen’s suit. In News papers, italics are resorted to, with good effect.”<sup>13</sup> Discussing this same letter, Cathy Davidson and Ada Norris further observe,

whether or not “we agree with Bonnin’s choice, what is clear is that she made it with political consciousness, understanding her identity as both cultural and performative” (xxiv). As Penelope Kelsey also notes, Bonnin is not full blood but frequently presents to white audiences as such, perhaps to showcase for her Euro-American audiences an indigenous identity uncomplicated by the bare facts of colonial history or perhaps seeking to limit the range of racial fantasies she had to address as she appeared before white audiences (71).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the *Congressional Record* memorializing the June, 1922 event states that “Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala Sa), a native Indian woman from the Yankton Agency, but now residing in Washington, in Indian costume, read an original prose poem entitled ‘A Dacotah Ode to Washington’ (12162, September 2, 1922). Even though the facts surrounding her original invitation remain obscure, we do know that Bonnin appeared, in Native dress, to participate in the proceedings held at the base of the Washington Monument on June 22, 1922.

#### Washington’s Monument Commemorative Stones

Designed to honor George Washington’s military leadership during the American Revolution, the Washington Monument began to take shape in 1848. Beset by construction problems, a lack of funding, and other national concerns (primarily the Civil War) the Monument finally opened to the public on October 9, 1888. A year later *The Washington Star* described it as “a place where women faint and strong men tremble” (Escobar 1). At the time, it was the tallest man-made structure in the world and it remains the tallest piece of free-standing masonry work in existence, rising 555 feet into the air as *the* material symbol of Washington, the city, and Washington, the man.

Solicited as a means for enhancing construction funds, one hundred and ninety-three commemorative stone tablets are set into the interior walls of the Washington Monument. The stones range in size from 2-by-2 feet to 6-by-8 feet and are placed at heights from 3 feet to 16 feet above each landing of the monument's central stair case. In 1911, prompted by the fact that many Western states were not represented in the monument, the Washington National Monument Society sent letters to these states requesting stones and providing instructions for their construction.

One of the last stones to be placed in the Washington Monument was the commemorative stone donated by the State of South Dakota. It is a two-foot by four-foot granite slab carved in relief with a representation of the state's seal that had been originally adopted in 1889. Within this seal, the state's motto "Under God the People Rule" appears on a banner within a circle of assembled images. The circle displays a blue sky and rolling hills, a river running through fertile agricultural land, and an active smelting furnace billowing light gray smoke. A steamship smoothly navigates the river's quiet waters as a male figure plows a field in front of a herd of cattle and a cornfield. The seal is framed by an outer circle of text which bears the words "State of South Dakota" and "Great Seal 1889." [See Figure 5].



Fig. 5. Official Seal for the State of South Dakota.

This was the image carved in granite that Bonnin was asked to honor as she spoke during its commemorative placement within the Washington Monument on June 22, 1922.

A Commemorative Ceremony  Washington and the Great State of South Dakota

By June of 1922, the Bonnins had lived in Washington for almost five years, but Gertrude and Raymond returned frequently to their home community in and around the Yankton Reservation of South Dakota. As the second decade of the twentieth century opened, Yankton, like most indigenous communities of the period, still found itself engaged in constant struggle. Impoverishment, a profound lack of significant educational opportunities or appropriate health care, and incompetent oversight from a generally corrupt federal bureaucracy continued to present daily challenges for Native peoples, in Yankton and elsewhere. During this period, Gertrude Bonnin continued to fight for enfranchisement, expanded forms of educational funding, abolishment of the Indian Bureau, and greater economic opportunities for all tribal communities.

As noted above, we do not know from the existing archival record how she came to speak at the commemoration ceremony held on June 22, but a black and white

photograph of ten assembled dignitaries (nine white men and one white woman) appeared in *The Washington Post* on June 23, 1922 under the headline: “South Dakota Adds Stone to Washington Monument.” A short description ran below this image:

Another memorial stone was added to the interior walls of the Washington Monument yesterday afternoon when South Dakota dedicated a block 300 feet from the base with exercises, including the presentation by Gov. W. H. McMaster and acceptance by Secretary of War Weeks. Miss Nellie Norbeck, daughter of the senator from South Dakota (standing), unveiled the stone. [See Figure 6].



Fig. 6. “South Dakota Adds Stone to Washington Monument,”  
*The Washington Post*, June 23, 1922.

There is no evidence in this photograph of a figure that would in any way resemble Bonnin, but Congressional records from 1922 confirm that she was clearly in attendance. It would seem that she may have been the only Native person in attendance; the audience appears to have been largely Euro-American, primarily men from South Dakota serving functionary roles on the state's behalf in the nation's capital.

On September 2, 1922 Senator Thomas Sterling from Vermillion, South Dakota asked for the commemorative proceedings from June 22 to be read into the *Congressional Record* "as has been done in the case of other like exercises held by other States" (12160). The proceeding format included an opening invocation from Reverend Pierce Pinch (formerly of Huron, South Dakota), a brief address by Senator Sterling, the unveiling of the stone by Miss Norbeck, and its subsequent acceptance by the Secretary of War, the Honorable John H. Weeks, whose department (at that time) had jurisdiction over the monument. Secretary Weeks was followed by Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin. Her performance was followed by an address from Senator Thomas Norbeck, remarks by Congressman Royal C. Johnson, and further addresses from Congressmen C.A. Christopherson and William Williamson, Judge John E. Carland, a federal district judge from South Dakota, and the Honorable O. S. Basford, a "pioneer in South Dakota" who provided his own unique perspective of the state's "uncomplicated" history (*Congressional Record* 12164). Concluding remarks were made by Senator Sterling and the Army Music School Band provided a closing number for those assembled.

The order of these proceedings positioned Bonnin's reading of her "Dacotah Ode to Washington" directly between extensive references to (and repeated manifestations of) a number of dominant ideologies designed to affirm a clear absence of native presence.



Bonnin's performance followed an invocation by Reverend Pinch which included thanking God for South Dakota's "history; the resources with which Thee has given men to deal; ....Grant O God, that this may be one of the great occasions that cultivate that patriotic spirit, that spirit of devotion, which constitutes the glory of the Nation" (*Congressional Record* 12160), as well as remarks by Senator Sterling and Secretary Weeks that referenced the Native populations of South Dakota in predictably dehumanizing ways. Their remarks referred to native communities as a "menace," as "wild," as a part of the history that has passed, and as an entities implicitly excluded from the "virtues" of South Dakota's "Pioneer" spirit, a spirit that is "evermore about to be"—imagined to be infinitely present, if not all powerful:

Our history has not been one of unalloyed peace . . . . seven Indian reservations within our borders, numerous old forts along and beyond the Missouri River, bear witness to the menace of Indian depredations and warfare in the earlier days. But the forts were but the outposts of that all-conquering civilization which when once established knows no abandonment or turning back. As the men of that earlier day dared the danger of the wild men of the West who believed their hunting grounds invaded, so those who followed braved the storms and all the rigors of the prairie and great plains region . . . .

And so, in a word, we see under what conditions, ordeals, and happy auspices too, South Dakota has come from small beginnings to her present proud position in the Union of States. Her people are pioneers or immediate descendants of pioneers. With struggle they have grown strong.

And like those imbued with the spirit of the true pioneer in all the fields of human endeavor, their story is a ‘story of faith and of effort and expectation and desire, and something evermore about to be.’

(*Congressional Record* 12161-12162)

After Bonnin’s brief reading, the following remarks were made by the other male dignitaries in attendance:

This history of our State is short but marvelous . . . .We have splendid people, and they have come to our State with the right spirit, the pioneer spirit, to take on the responsibility [of building up the Commonwealth] without flinching . . . .

Here lies buried the remains of countless monsters of ages gone, hundreds of whose bones now grace the museums of the world. Here, indeed is a monument of the past whose ever unfolding pages offer unrivaled opportunities for the student of the flora and fauna that thrived a million years ago . . . .

In recent extensive travel and business transactions with the successful farmers of South Dakota I found Finlanders, Hollanders, Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, Scotch—indeed every European race seemed to be with us as well as a sprinkling from Asia. These races are intermarrying, and in the second and third generations race pride and prejudice are disappearing and a new race is becoming common.

To the south are Mexicans and to the north Canadians. Let the people of this United States be known as Americans. So far as the people of

South Dakota are choosers, Americans we are and Americans we will remain and of the 100 per cent variety. (*Congressional Record* 12162-12165)

When we recognize that not one of these other individuals referenced the indigenous populations of Dakota territory, despite finding ways to honor ancient dinosaur bones<sup>15</sup> and a “sprinkling” of farmers with Asian blood, one cannot fail to surmise that this must have been a profoundly difficult event for Bonnin as she aimed to engage in an assertion of native presence, particularly when we remember that the State Seal also erases any relationship between this particular land formation and indigenous culture.

As Bonnin stood to address an elite audience of legislators, judges, lawyers, and media representatives, she had to navigate a number of critical tensions. She certainly would have hoped to engage her audience in a meaningful dialogue regarding indigenous concerns, if not at that particular moment, then within the larger span of time she spent in Washington as an advocate and activist. This particular audience included a wide range of powerful members; key individuals that could help her accomplish a number of her larger educative, legislative, and adjudicative aims. In order to take full advantage of this speaking opportunity, Bonnin needed rhetorical strategies that would allow her to meet traditional expectations for praise, honor, display as entertainment, and simultaneously disrupt or challenge this audiences’ prevailing stereotypes and prejudices.

Ambiguity, Amplification, Metaphor, Story  Rhetorical Critique

Gertrude Bonnin stood at the base of the Washington Monument on that June morning in 1922 as a mark of indigenous culture, appearing not only as a woman, but also as a representation, a cultural construction that re-presented the traditions and

influences of the Native Sioux. It is unlikely that most members of her audience viewed her as a Native woman invoking Dakota Sioux culture; it is more likely that, with her appearance in Native dress, Bonnin provided the “Indian” spectacle that her audience anticipated and indeed had requested for this event. Thus, paradoxically, while Bonnin appears before this audience—as the *Congressional Record* notes, “in Indian costume”—essentially as a form of display, or as an exotic curiosity, Bonnin also, in actuality, invokes both tribal identity and Native subjectivity during her time at the speaker’s podium. She agreed to appear as spectacle, but she uses this opportunity as a means for acquiring access to a very public, very powerful audience, and as a means for beginning to rework or reconfigure prevailing conceptions of indigenous peoples and culture.

Bonnin begins to destabilize her audiences’ standard expectations for epideictic performances and for typical “Indian” appearances by invoking an ambiguous opening, one that fails to directly honor or praise Washington (the man or the city), the Washington Monument itself, or the specific entity being honored that day, the State of South Dakota. Defying conventional expectations for epideictic speech, the *Congressional Record* indicates that Bonnin began immediately by reciting from her “Dacotah Ode to Washington,” a text written by Bonnin specifically for this event.<sup>16</sup> The choice to begin by reciting her Ode is significant because it engenders both ambiguity and amplification—key moves for engaging in rhetorical critique through epideictic.

As just mentioned, Bonnin creates ambiguity and challenges or troubles her audience’s standard expectations for the start of her speech by failing to mention any form of direct praise for the people, the edifice, or the political entities being honored that

day. This unexpected opening provokes curiosity and may have facilitated more attentive listening from the assembled audience. Her initial failure to mention any form of direct praise may have also led her audience to a more open-ended kind of questioning and processing as they tried to comprehend her intended message. Bonnin then engages in amplification by preceding to recite her “Dacotah Ode to Washington,” a syncretic text she crafted by combining the classical literary form of the ode with Dakota story and oral tradition. In general, amplification refers to the various linguistic and discursive devices that emphasize or “amplify” a particular point. Such devices as rhetorical tools are numerous, but often include repetition, elaboration, magnification, literary allusions, narrative accounts, and forms of physical presence designed to emphasize particular rhetorical aims (Jasinski, *Sourcebook* 12-13).

Here, Bonnin immediately amplifies, or emphasizes, native presence in several key ways. First, even as her audience turns their attention to her in anticipation of encountering some kind of “Indian spectacle,” she disrupts these expectations by presenting an original speech that draws from both a “high” or elevated Eurowestern cultural form (the ode) and revered indigenous practice (storytelling). The audience’s initial gaze of absence is disrupted through native presence as Bonnin physically and aurally delivers a speech that literally reworks Eurowestern tradition into a new kind of art form that both accommodates and honors cross-cultural encounters. Then, by uttering the word “Dacotah” at the very start of her speech and by essentially beginning with the telling of a story, as discussed below, Bonnin amplifies, or emphasizes the central importance of story for shaping and defining communal practices, subsequently shifting the site of rhetorical power from the classical site of epideictic to time-honored traditions

found within indigenous culture. Finally, given that classical ode forms are generally associated with tragedy, Bonnin's use of this specific literary form may have reached beyond aims of syncretism to emphasize or amplify a more pointed kind of social critique regarding contemporary conditions for indigenous communities as well.

As Bonnin continues to speak, she delivers a performance with three separate movements generally found within the classical ode form, but each movement addresses Native concerns and presents resolutions of communal conflicts through indigenous worldviews or Native belief systems. The titles for each of these three movements—"The Mystic Circle," "Upon the Way", and "The Message"—highlight the Native focus Bonnin designed for each Ode section.

Her first movement, "The Mystic Circle," functions as a framing device for the entire performance and represents the initial *strophe* or stanza that begins her epic tale. Bonnin's narrative opens in a setting that evokes Dakota/Dacotah/South Dakota lands inhabited by indigenous communities: "Upon the prairie grass sat aged men and women, in mystic circle, their bronzed faces upturned toward the stars." These "sage" figures then summon before them a "Yankton Dacotah of the young generation" who is asked to serve as "our messenger, our interpreter." The elders note that: "Loyal Americans will gather before a great stone shrine at the Nation's capital. South Dakotans beckon to us, the Dacotah to join them" (*Congressional Record* 12162). The movement ends with the elders questioning their young messenger and making pointed references to indigenous views of community, honor, and service:

‘You are called as our messenger, our interpreter. Are you willing to serve?’ Without hesitation, the answer came, ‘I am.’ The other members

of the circle, hitherto silent, responded in approval, ‘Be it so.’ ‘Hecetu.’ The spokesman said, ‘You have answered well. Service is the highest privilege.’

Together they taught *her* what to say, placed an eagle plume in her hand. ‘With this sacred quill write word for word what we have told you here to-night,’ they commanded. ‘At dawn start upon the journey to the great stone shrine with our message.’ In final parting bade her, ‘Upon the way keep your own heart warm with love and strong with truth. Lift up your eyes for vision.’ (*Congressional Record* 12612, emphasis added)

We observe in this first movement many clear assertions of native presence that seem to directly challenge and rework dominant social perceptions. Contrary to prevailing views, indigenous communities from lands now associated with South Dakota have not vanished, but are present, speaking, active, remaining in dialogue with dominant political entities. Ideally, as the Ode emphasizes, South Dakota should “beckon”—should encourage or call forward—those tribal communities generally excluded from the political center. Challenging the vibrancy and health of dominant society, Bonnin depicts the Dacotah community in a generative communal circle that affirms service for the good of others as the highest social privilege and honor. Perhaps ironically, Bonnin contrasts this communal image with the “Loyal Americans” who worship mutely at the foot of an inanimate object, the great stone shrine. Bonnin highlights and repeatedly emphasizes the wisdom learned from those who have come before, the wisdom learned from oral tradition, and the competent role that women can play, just like the young female Yankton messenger, in resolving public disputes. The need for this young messenger to

“write word for word” what she has been told by the elders in order to communicate with people assembled in the nation’s capital emphasizes dominant society’s inability to understand the efficacy of orality and the shared communal values sustained by time-honored oral traditions.

During the second movement of her Ode, entitled “Upon the Way,” Bonnin uses figurative speech that moves, like the *antistrophe* of a classical ode, from West to East to remind her audience of the historical forces that have brought this young Yankton messenger to Washington:

Straight as an arrow flies from a strong bow, sped the Dacotah runner  
from the hallow’d circle of the starlit prairie. At break of day hastened  
with the message, speeding faster, ever faster. Upon the way were many  
relays, from footsore pony to stagecoach plunging over rough country  
roads, from coach to the iron horse gliding rapidly upon a steel track. The  
miraculous journey to the Nation’s Capital is made in safety. All faithful  
to her trust, the messenger stands before the monumental shrine of  
Washington. (*Congressional Record* 12162)

Traditionally the shortest section of a lyric ode, Bonnin’s second movement follows this classical pattern and further invokes a kind of double turn as the action moves from West to East and the passage adopts a darker tone. Bonnin’s second movement, however, confirms for her assembled audience that Dacotah communities do indeed remain, despite the sweeping forces of change they have had to maneuver. Through this reading and through her very physical presence at the base of the Washington Monument, Bonnin emphasizes that the Dacotah remain despite the arrival of the “footsore pony,” the “stage-



coach,” and the Western rail system, or the “iron horse gliding rapidly along a steel track” which all continued to bring an ever increasing number of frontier settlers and deeply threatened tribal existence. Despite these devastating changes, the young Dacotah messenger is able to journey to the nation’s capital, arriving “in safety”—essentially intact—and “all faithful” to the trust she previously established with her tribal community. The messenger remains an integral part of her tribal community, even as she appears within a city that represents the center of national power and even as she assumes a subservient position before a monumental granite structure meant to depict the penultimate manifestation of patriarchal forms of Eurowestern power.

Bonnin’s third movement or *epode* entitled “The Message,” makes one last turn back to the East as it completes the classical narrative arc of the lyric ode. This is Bonnin’s longest section and arguably her most important one, as she reveals her ultimate rhetorical aims. Again, we see a heightened use of amplification to emphasize native presence and challenge dominant orderings—indigenous voices, indigenous identities, and Native perspectives are continually invoked and reinforced throughout this section. As the movement opens, the audience hears Bonnin proclaim:

‘The day of days is at hand. It is now.’ These the words from the  
 Seven Council Fires of the Dakotah.<sup>17</sup> ‘We sing the name of our first  
 President. We call him Washington—Ohitika—undaunted leader of  
 nations crying in the dark. He brought them light from the sky, taught  
 them principles of peace and brotherhood; taught the lisping multitudes to  
 say, ‘We the people,’ counseled them ‘to observe good faith and justice  
 toward all nations.’

The Dacotah people carol with lusty throats the memorable deeds of Washington. He scanned with eagle eye the hope of united people and happy; beheld the vision of democratic government. He rose on powerful eagle wings, with unswerving purpose attained to lofty virtues of public service.

A victory song we sing to the memory of Washington, who disdained kingship upon a lower realm and preferred to be servant of the people, who by his life demonstrated only 'Right makes might.' Then over all his glorious achievements upheld our sacred emblem, the eagle, pointing to its meaning in all his noble acts . . . . (*Congressional Record* 12162)

It is in this third and final movement that Bonnin finally mentions Washington and seems to acknowledge her audience's expectation for praise and honor, but she carefully filters her praise through an indigenous worldview and simultaneously engages in very pointed forms of rhetorical critique. She begins by noting the significance of the contemporary moment for the Dacotah community: "The day of days is at hand. It is now" . . . here she seems to be constructing a kind of reckoning or accounting for past deeds. Bonnin goes on to portray Washington, the man, as a leader who is not brave or courageous, but "undaunted" perhaps as in undeterred or not easily discouraged from pursuing an erroneous course of military or political action. Bonnin's reference in the third paragraph of this passage to a victory song performed in order to celebrate the "memory" of Washington, not the man himself, may also evidence another effort by Bonnin to challenge dominant society's uncomplicated, iconic view of Washington.

As further evidence of critique, Bonnin states that Washington led a nation “crying in the dark,” implying that he led a nation perhaps in its infancy, but certainly adrift and suffering. This nation is comprised of “lispering” multitudes, a mass of citizens who cannot speak “properly” or effectively. Bonnin concludes the first half of her *epode* by noting that Washington’s most glorious achievement can be found in his upholding of “our sacred emblem, the eagle, *pointing* to its meaning with all his noble acts” (emphasis added). This last sentence notes that the memory of Washington invokes an image sacred to many indigenous cultures, but that as a leader, Washington’s legacy merely points or gestures toward the actual values this image embodies. Bonnin may be arguing here that Washington—the man and the city—failed to achieve the kind of governance that embraced justice, service, and honor as epitomized through this powerful, cross-cultural symbol, particularly for indigenous communities.

Perhaps more importantly, with this final movement of her Ode, we see Bonnin build upon the symbol of the eagle as an extended metaphor. She continues to deploy this symbol as a cross-cultural referent with a multiplicity of meanings, for the figure of the eagle invokes many sacred or revered concepts in both Native and American cultures. In her first movement Bonnin refers to tribal elders as “keepers of sacred eagle mysteries” and these elders subsequently ask their Dacotah runner to take a message toward the East written with the “sacred quill” of an eagle plume (*Congressional Record* 12162), but it is in the third and final movement that Bonnin crafts the full weight and substance of her metaphorical cross-cultural message. Indeed, in the first half of the third movement, as referenced above, Bonnin observes that Washington “scanned with eagle eye” to note the hope of the Dacotahs, a “united and happy people.” Washington himself rises on

“powerful eagle wings, (and) with unswerving purpose attained to lofty public virtues” (12162).

Then, as Bonnin moves into the final half of her third movement, her references to the eagle increase significantly, closely connecting this extended metaphor to her overall rhetorical focus and “The Message” she ultimately seeks to convey. In this last section, Bonnin resumes her discussion of Washington, the man, and speaks explicitly about him through voices from the Dakota community assembled on the plains:

We venerate the memory of our great pale-face brother, Washington,  
the chiefest among guardians of spiritual fires—liberty and unity.  
Washington, thrice worthy of the decoration of the eagle plume, for he left  
the impress of its meaning upon the hearts and minds of all Americans.

(*Congressional Record* 12162)

Here, Bonnin’s use of the phrase, “we venerate” may be significant. Bonnin, speaking as and for the Dakota community, seems to be praising Washington from a position of deference or subservience associated with some Eurowestern definitions of the word “venerate,” not necessarily invoking a form of honor as esteem shared among colleagues or equals. This word choice signals, perhaps, that the Dakota community pays respect to Washington out of obligation, not necessarily by choice or desire. Bonnin reminds her listeners that Washington was charged as a “guardian” to protect and nurture two foundational communal values—liberty and unity. She does not say that Washington should be credited for achieving liberty or unity. Instead she notes that Washington deserves the decoration of the eagle plume, for he impressed *the meaning* of this honor upon the hearts and minds of the American people.

With this language, Bonnin attempts to use the iconicity—the cultural meanings—traditionally associated with the figure of Washington to move her audience to an enlarged understanding of liberty and unity. To accomplish this aim, Bonnin, speaking through Dakota voices, shifts the focus back upon the figure of the eagle:

This is our glad song to-day. The eagle represents the conscious spirit of man, soaring into the silent upper air for meditation and spiritual communion, soaring away from the transitory turmoils of the day, into the heights, there gaining wider vision, added strength, and wisdom, there finding the secret of joyous being, unburdened from the pettiness of make-beliefs. (*Congressional Record* 12162)

In this moment associated with a “glad song” the eagle soars upward to transcend social division and the “pettiness” of prejudices or false perceptions as “make-beliefs.” This movement by the eagle models a means for enlarging communal values and simultaneously enacts a broader form of cultural understanding. That is to say, initially the soaring eagle models the kind of conscious human spirit Bonnin urges her audience to adopt as they work, through meditation, to gain “wider vision,” expanded forms of understanding, and spiritual communion. Perhaps more significantly, the soaring eagle also becomes a more potent visual representation—an enhanced, more multivalent linguistic sign—that successfully merges or syncretically fuses at least two cultural readings of this same symbol together in its moment of transcendence.

This second process, the eagle’s refigured, enlarged symbolic meaning occurs as Bonnin asks her Euro-American audience to view the soaring eagle with an expanded sense of vision that includes Dacotah beliefs and tribal perspectives. Within Euro-

American culture, certainly, the eagle references the shared ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality, but it is also associated with supreme power and authority. The eagle appears on the national emblem, on most coinage, and it is the symbol most frequently invoked to represent patriotic acts or sentiments. In contrast, as Santee Sioux physician and activist Charles Eastman noted in 1917, while “(t)he American eagle is our national emblem, . . . probably few know that it is also the sacred emblem of the American Indian. I believe this fact to have been universally recognized among the different tribes with their wide variations of language and custom” (89). As Eastman explains:

For many Native American cultures, the eagle symbolizes nobility of spirit, perfect courage, dignity and poise, vision and wisdom. (We) employ its feathers as the only decoration of honor for distinguished services in peace and war . . . it is especially interesting to note that the wearing of an eagle’s feather did not necessarily mean the killing of an enemy. It might represent the rescue of another at great risk to (one’s self), the saving of (one’s) band from starvation by success in a difficult scout for game in mid-winter, or the giving of a great feast and conferring all of (one’s) possessions upon the poor in recognition of a family event, such as the birth or coming of age of a child. The basic idea was not that of war and destruction, but of self-denying service. (Eastman 90-91)

Bonnin shared Eastman’s cultural Sioux heritage; here, she challenges her Euro-American audience to view the eagle from these new perspectives. She asks her audience to rethink their uncomplicated associations of the eagle (as *the* symbol of “American” forms of liberty and unity) with individualism, might, and dominant forms of power.

Bonnin's extended eagle metaphor challenges her audience to expand their view of liberty (the "unburdened" moment) as this concept might successfully function in an enlarged vision of unity and community, reworking and reversing rhetorics of dominance. As Gerald Vizenor notes, metaphor can operate as a powerful linguistic tool for survivance and native presence through its ability to provide more expansive forms of signification (*Survivance* 12-13). In this instance, Bonnin presents notions of liberty or freedom as the kind of courage to address social conflict—"transistory turmoils"—from more culturally diverse perspectives. Penelope Kelsey contends that Bonnin consistently argued for the primacy of Dakota ways and Dakota worldviews in her autobiographical writing by invoking tribal narratives embedded within her popular "Indian" stories (15, 71-75). In a similar fashion, Bonnin encourages this policy-oriented, politically connected audience to implement—like the Dacotah runner—a kind of service to others that is much more community-oriented and certainly less self-focused. The tribal narrative functions here as an embedded call for very different forms of social relations as its highlights Dakota principles and values.

Indeed, to reinforce these enlarged views that Bonnin hoped to provide for her powerful audience, Bonnin concludes with the following comprehensive and emphatic statements:

Comrades of the earth, the hope of our humanity lies in the preservation of high ideals, in holding fast to these symbols and precepts bequeathed us through all ages and races of men till we have learned their innermost lesson. It is well that the sacred eagle is carved upon America's gold, lest we forget in the heat of world commerce our brotherhood upon earth. It is

well that the eagle is engraved upon the buttons and insignia of our brave men, lest we forget in the wild flurry of swift locomotion and radio communication to perfect our relationships, man to man, nation to nation, with justice and mercy.

Long live the memory of Washington, whose praises we sing this day of days!

Long live the eagle principles he inculcated in the hearts of the people!

Then shall come many days of peace, prosperity, and happiness!

*(Congressional Record 12162)*

Speaking as and for the Dakota community she has invoked, Bonnin completes her Ode by further emphasizing enlarged views of unity and community—a perspective that envisions “comrades of the earth,” not just a select group of inhabitants on one small strip of land associated with the (mere) State of South Dakota or other colonial settler formations. This larger vision, she claims, can be achieved through a shared understanding of the “symbols and precepts” represented within the (expanded) symbol of the eagle, particularly justice and mercy. The figure of the eagle now resonates with a new, more complex meaning, one that includes shared values for a community that redefines itself as both equitable and compassionate. In a pointed closing, this reworked eagle symbol further challenges dominant views of national memory, archive, and history. For only *when* these refigured eagle principles are inculcated in—ingrained within—the hearts of the people, *then* shall come days of peace and prosperity. This deferral emphasizes Bonnin’s belief that her visions, and the hopes of the Dacotah people, have not yet been fully achieved. Moreover, as “lispering” or disordered narrations



of the past circulate around her and an immutable granite monument stands before her, it is Dakota voices enacted through Bonnin's story, and the expanded views of liberty, unity, history, and memory presented in her "Dacotah Ode" that arguably will prevail.

"*Hecetu*" to *Ohitika*  Forging Alliances, Creating Sovereign Spaces

Beyond her use of ambiguity, amplification, and an extended eagle metaphor, as story, Bonnin invokes bilingual phrases in two key moments of her recitation, adding a further level of complexity to her nuanced, polyvocal performance. During the first movement of her Ode, Bonnin describes the following exchange between the young Dacotah messenger and one of the tribal elders gathered around the sacred circle:

You are called as our messenger, our interpreter. Are you willing to serve?

Without hesitation the answer came, 'I am.' The other members of the circle, hitherto silent, responded in approval, 'Be it so.' '*Hecetu*.'

The spokesman said, 'You have answered well. Service is the highest privilege.' (*Congressional Record* 12162, emphasis added)

In her recitation or reading, Bonnin translates the phrase *hecetu* as "be it so" for the assembled, non-Native audience, but this Dakota phrase can also mean, "as, so, thus; right, well" (Riggs 212) or "as, so, thus; that is the way, right, well" (Buechel 179). The messenger stood before an assembled audience in Washington, living proof of her willingness to serve, living proof of her willingness to translate messages "word by word" from revered tribal elders. Her willingness to serve can be confirmed with the phrase, "be it so," but this phrase may also highlight concepts Bonnin and Dakota world views privilege—communication, dialogue, wisdom passed down from older generations—this is the path Bonnin beseeches her audience to follow, for "that is the

way” can also be read into this passage under a more expansive reading of the Dakota phrase, *hecetu*.

Similarly, in the third and final movement of her Ode, Bonnin opens this section of her recitation with the following statement:

The day of days is at hand. It is now. These are the words from the Seven Council Fires of the Dakotah. We sing the name of our first President. We call him Washington—*Ohitika*—undaunted leader of nations crying in the dark. (*Congressional Record* 12162, emphasis added)

Curiously, Bonnin does not translate this Dakota phrase, *Ohitika*, for her non-native audience. By implication, and working with context, most audience members may have interpreted this phrase to be another name for leader. However, this noun phrase generally means “to be furious, terrible, brave” (Buechel 378) and its associated adjectival phrase, *wohitika*, can be translated to mean “terrible, furious, violent; energetic” (Riggs 447). Associating the word “Washington”—the man, the city, or the stone monument—with words such as “furious, terrible, or violent” is very different from benignly associating this word or name with terms like “brave” or “leader.” The contestatory nature of this Dakota phrase and the way it operates as pointed critique, if only for audience members fluent in Dakota, cannot be ignored. By invoking the word, *Ohitika*, but choosing not to provide its nuanced translation, Bonnin built the necessary alliance needed to confirm for her non-Native audience that she understood her role was to praise and honor certain images and prevailing ideologies, but the lingering presence of the Dakota word, and its associations with ferocity and violence leave yet another a trace of native presence.

Recent work by Scott Richard Lyons and Malea Powell within the field of rhetoric and composition emphasizes the need for scholars to develop a more sophisticated understanding of multivalent articulations, like Bonnin's, that are designed to create both critical alliances for survival and critical spaces for self-determination or sovereignty. In "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want From Writing?" Lyons argues that sovereignty is rhetorical because most of the debate over sovereignty resides within dominant discursive formations—oral and written—that do not generally welcome or include Native voices. Native discourses about sovereignty exist under what Lyons terms "rhetorical imperialism" where "dominant powers . . . assert control of others by setting the terms of the debate" (452). Lyons argues that we must look much more carefully within dominant discursive formations for moments when Native peoples enact their "inherent right and ability to determine their own communicative needs and desires" (462). Rhetorical sovereignty, as enacted, becomes the "control of meaning" through rhetorical practices grounded in acts of self-determination (449-450). In her work on the significance of cross-cultural articulations authored by Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins in *Life Among the Piutes*, Malea Powell builds on Lyons' definition of rhetorical sovereignty to explain:

Winnemucca's ability to participate in both Euro-American and Paiute cultural practices, her literacy in both of those cultural discourses, marks an important moment for those of us who 'study Indians' as well.

Winnemucca's ultimate solution was not the 'torn between two worlds' victimization still too often attributed to Native peoples and Native scholars, which leaves American Indians who didn't 'disappear' in the

position of being victims of our own subjectivity. Instead, her solution was rhetorical—to pick and choose from both cultural systems, to participate in both in such a way that she gestures toward a new possibility for those of us ‘civilized Indians’ who continue her project of resistance and negotiation in the face of an ongoing project of the rhetoric of empire at work in these United States even today. (“Princess Sarah” 77-78)

Like her contemporary, Sarah Winnemucca, Bonnin also engaged in a sophisticated process of “picking and choosing,” crafting her performance to operate within two cultural systems simultaneously. Even as Bonnin appeared to praise “Washington”—the man, the city, the monument, the nation—she carefully controls the meaning for this linguistic sign (and all of its associated referents) throughout her entire performance. Such control evidences a sophisticated ability to negotiate alliance and resistance; this control affirms Bonnin’s ability to gesture toward new possibilities as a form of rhetorical sovereignty, even as her Euro-American audience may have only seen and heard a celebration of native absence.

Intriguingly, Bonnin also engages in self-authorizing, an act which takes on even more significance as this speech assumes its circulation as a textual form. Remember that Bonnin performs the role of the Dacotah runner; “she”—as the runner, the message carrier, the word scribe and translator, the cultural mediator—is the speaker authorized by the elders to establish voice and presence for the larger Native community within dominant culture. Penelope Kelsey asserts that Bonnin’s use of tribal forms of self-narration in her own autobiographical writing often proposed a competing school of “femininity” to the Euro-American ideal, embedding a “firmly resistant narrative of

Dakota history in her self-fashioning” (68). The similar self-fashioning here refigures traditional Euro-American gender dynamics and simultaneously references Dakota values which embrace and foster leadership roles for women. As this speech gains agency through written form, these narrated disruptions continue to facilitate presence, voice, and agency from multiply marginalized spaces.

As discussed below, whether or not Bonnin’s speech moved her contemporary audience, whether or not she expanded or shifted their existing conceptions of native presence or Native peoples in any way, it is likely that Bonnin anticipated that her speech—as a written text—would survive and circulate beyond June 22, 1922. Even if Bonnin’s contemporary audience viewed her delivery of the “Dacotah Ode” as a quaint, entertaining (and perhaps confusing) display or spectacle performed by one of those “civilized Indians,” subsequent accounts of her speech, and the speech text itself, circulated beyond that moment, becoming part of an authorized, if not “official” national discourse. This textual movement is significant. With this shift to written form, the rhetorical moments where Bonnin’s controlled a range of meanings, despite significant rhetorical constraints, become a clear exercise in rhetorical sovereignty as theorized by Scott Richard Lyons, and others.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, when we consider Bonnin’s rhetorical act through theoretical considerations of *survivance* and *transmotion* as articulated by Gerald Vizenor, we realize that her speech becomes a mark through new words, a moment of commemoration and memorialization that reinscribes or refigures a national archive and lingers as an ongoing moment of presence, rather than absence.

## Speech as Textual Artifact Survivance, Transmotion, Indigenous Activism

With the limited existing archival record, it is difficult to discern the audience's actual, immediate response to Bonnin's performance. Certainly the local newspapers did not seem to find her speech significant enough to mention in their coverage of this event, even though this may have been another large factor motivating Bonnin's performance. Any reporting of this event—particularly the words of her speech—in national media outlets would clearly amplify and expand or enlarge her message. We know that mention of Bonnin in association with this event appears in at least one newspaper account published in Legrand, Iowa, but her speech is not referenced in any national newspaper from this period.<sup>19</sup> Nor do Bonnin's existing personal papers include any correspondence or any notes that speak to these lingering questions of audience and reception.

Perhaps disappointed in this lack of media coverage, as an experienced public advocate, Bonnin would also have known that deliberative and judicial forms of change occur through slow, arduous institutional processes. It is reasonable to assume that she used this limited rhetorical opportunity to argue for recognition, to argue for dignity, to beseech an audience of deliberative and judicial decision-makers to act with the kind of wisdom that honors self-sacrifice, justice, mercy, and perhaps ideally even native presence. Penelope Kelsey asserts that Bonnin used Dakota tribal perspectives in her autobiographical writing for *The Atlantic* just a decade or so earlier—specifically employing honorific speech patterns, dream narratives, landscape narratives, and educational tales—to redress stereotypes and raise public awareness of indigenous issues (75). Kelsey argues that through these textual maneuvers, Bonnin successfully critiqued colonial policy as an indigenous activist (75). I argue here that Bonnin's "Dacotah Ode to

Washington” as an extant text continues to function beyond its moment of delivery in a similar fashion and that, as discussed below, Bonnin viewed its ensuing textuality as another critical rhetorical opening. Ironically, whether or not her oral performance succeeded for its contemporary audience, Bonnin anticipated that her Ode would linger and circulate with much greater communicative potential as a textual artifact.

Again, as an experienced political figure residing in Washington, Bonnin would have known that her speech would be read into the *Congressional Record* and subsequently preserved for (potentially) a much larger public audience. In this sense, too, Bonnin cleverly inserted story and oral tradition into a written archive that worked actively and continually to deny the existence of these critical native concepts. Moreover, her personal archives contain four copies of the *Congressional Record* issue that memorialized the commemoration ceremony, and her speech is marked with blue pencil. It was her custom to send copies of Congressional proceedings to interested parties and political allies throughout the United States during the time that she resided in Washington. At a minimum, she seems to have continued to use this speech text to build enhanced forms of awareness and understanding in her ongoing work as an indigenous activist; playing in fact, with orality and textuality.

Beyond providing a written text that she could later use to enhance her efforts as an advocate and activist, Bonnin’s speech—as a performance and as a subsequent text that circulates with “official” authority—troubles and disrupts colonial formations related to “American” history, memory, and archive. Certainly, as rhetorical scholar Lawrence Rosenfield observes, the epideictic form calls upon a community to give thought to what they witness, and this thoughtful beholding as commemoration constitutes memorializing

(133). Bonnin's performance memorializes—bears witness to—an overlooked, deeply marginalized kind of South Dakota/Dakota/Dacotah presence. The official proceedings for this event reported in the *Congressional Record* bear testimony to this witnessing, this presence. Despite contemporaneous conditions of exclusion and marginalization, Dakota traditions, Dakota values remain embedded within a dominant historical narrative; these cultural traces exist as a crease that disrupts smooth narratives of empire—they are a turn, a cut, a trace that disturbs, disfigures, and unsettles.

Clearly, Bonnin created significant traces of native presence on June 22, 1922 that continued to reverberate as reinscription, as lasting marks made with new words. Her Dacotah story circulated at the base of the Washington Monument in the air and in the minds of her audience on that day. Secondary audiences read the limited newspaper coverage discussing and further amplifying her address. The publication of Bonnin's "Dacotah Ode" within the *Congressional Record* caused this native "crease" to be deposited in libraries, archives, and official government repositories throughout the country, where it continues to be saved and maintained, even if inadvertently, through microfiche and digital reproductions of the nation's official proceedings. As Bonnin's Ode assumes alphabetic form and continues to circulate, its rhetorical power and significance expand. Extensive critical work by Kim Blaeser found within *Writing in the Oral Tradition* reminds us of the important dialogic qualities oral tradition continues to invoke, even as it becomes embedded within textual forms. Orality creates the shadow presence of other voices, reclaiming tradition and reconstituting community. Writing forged from polyvocal forms of oral tradition reworks and enlarges accepted, dominant



forms of history and memory, effectively breaking traditional “strategies of containment” in order to invoke, present, and explore more fuller truths (Blaeser 87).

Speech acts that create a presence with the power to upset and unravel dominant discursive formations also represent *survivance* as theorized by Vizenor. Writing in 2008, Vizenor provides the following definition of *survivance*:

Theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, and catchword history, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, active traditions, customs, narrative resistance, and clearly observable in personal attributes, such as humor, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihilism, and victimry. (*Survivance* 1)

As rhetoric and composition scholar John D. Miles recently observed in his review of Vizenor’s conception, *survivance* emerges out of individual rhetorical acts and creates a presence that upsets and unravels discursive control over Native peoples. Indeed, for rhetoricians, *survivance* can be seen as a kind of agency that emerges *between* the beliefs and values of the audience and those emerging through (the speaker’s) rhetoric (Miles 40-41, emphasis added). Bonnin’s ability to maneuver strategically, to negotiate effectively between her audiences’ expectations for an epideictic performance engaging in praise and the actual rhetorical aims she presented June 22 rendered her speech an act of *survivance*—an assertion of story, tradition, custom, and resistance, an assertion of creativity and moral courage. This speech act, in and of itself, is significant and worthy of study given its ability to disrupt dominant discursive formations of the Indian and

Indianness that operated (and continue to operate) as empty signifiers. As Bonnin works within the constraints of Western Eurocentric rhetoric and the epideictic form, she alters its meaning through her use of story and her other rhetorical maneuvers discussed above. As Bonnin appropriates this rhetorical genre and reinfuses it with new meaning, she disrupts prevailing forms of linguistic and figural representation. Simulations that remove speakers from their own “reality” (hence absenting them) are paradoxically the very means for gaining presence when presence is defined as the rhetorical alteration of a given simulation.

Moreover, John D. Miles observes that our discipline largely ignores Vizenor’s theory of *transmotion*, but connections between motion and creation are also central to conceptions of *survivance* and sovereignty. Vizenor recognizes sovereignty when it works toward *survivance* and writes:

Sovereignty as motion and transmotion is heard and seen in oral presentations, the pleasure of native memories and stories, and understood in the values of human and spiritual motion in languages. Sovereignty is transmotional and used here in most senses of the word motion: likewise the ideas and conditions of motion have deferred meanings that reach, naturally, to other contexts of action, resistance, dissent, and political controversy. . . . Sovereignty as transmotion is visionary. . . . transmotion is survivance, not an absolute power over people or territories. (*Fugitive Poses* 182, 189)

Eurowestern power structures privilege alphabetic text. Strategic manipulations to undermine or destabilize empty signifiers circulating within dominant discursive

formations in American society assume the most power and efficacy for dominant audiences as they enter written form. This shift to written forms of narration or written forms of presumptively “authoritative” alphabetic text creates a native presence in more widely accepted forms of dominant public discourse.

Ultimately, motion and movement assume theoretical significance in two key respects in relation to Bonnin’s speech act. First, Bonnin specifically resists absence on June 22, 1922, even as she “displays” or presents to her audience as an empty or false representation, because she engages in *transmotion* which allows for a manipulation of subject positions and discursive moves that resist static forms of representation. As Bonnin celebrates, and teaches, and criticizes, she appears simultaneously as “Indian,” as Mrs. Bonnin, as native storyteller, as the Dacotah community, effectively creating discursive and conceptual space for social change. She disrupts and displaces popular beliefs and perceptions circulating in public discourse. Second, the speech text that moves beyond June 22 substantively redefines Native or indigenous identity, further allowing for possibilities of change and transformation. Even if these written sheaves—old newspapers or pages from the *Congressional Record* that remain in non-circulating storage bins—do not presently reach or affect a known audience, they have infiltrated representation. They remain in motion and continue to move forward in time as valued artifacts within dominant social and discursive formations. Ever embedded, they contain dynamism as signs with semiotic power that can be activated and reactivated through discovery, rediscovery, and review. Native writer and scholar Louis Owens notes, “Silence a people’s stories and you erase a culture.” This collecting, the memorializing of

Bonnin's "Dacotah Ode" within a sanctioned record of our nation's official history means that Dacotah voices may continue to be ignored, but they will never be silenced.

Traces of discourse remain, functioning as a tease of presence that disrupts dominant stories of absence within history and national memory. These disruptions—with all the knowledges, all the traditions, all the Dakota practices they embody—continue to function like a circle of eagle feathers, a sacred, continuous arc that has been set in motion and remains in transit, spinning toward an uncertain, but seemingly infinite future.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. *Congressional Record*, September 22, 1922 at 12162. I have chosen to use a symbol representing a spinning circle of eagle feathers throughout this second chapter in order to draw further attention to key concepts emphasized here, including native presence, reinscription, and transmotion.

2. The *Congressional Record* refers to this speech act as the “Dacotah” Ode, while the preferred contemporary spelling is “Dakota.” I use both orthographic versions here, but generally try to limit my use of “Dacotah” to events occurring in 1922.

3. Epideictic can also be educative and function as a “preparatory” discourse for later action, see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca at 49-52.

4. Epideictic can function as significant social action in and of itself when it becomes a moment that shows, highlights, or specifically enacts what might otherwise remain unnoticed or invisible (Beale 225; Rosenfield 135); see also, Hauser and Prelli.

5. See generally, Richards at 2; Poulakos at 161, and Sheard, who sees epideictic as “multivalent” and a “force for change” (774, 777, 787).

6. The Monument depicts Lincoln standing erect, holding a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, while a black man kneels before him.

7. Richards is careful to note that “the 1905 commemoration did not make Sacagawea appear to be an equal subject . . . the Anglo-American women who venerated Sacagawea . . . took the liberty of speaking for the history and views of American Indian women generally, subsuming their diverse experiences under a single narrative that endorsed the colonization of the West. The 1905 commemoration is open to

critiques, particularly for its failure to include American Indian voices and for its reproduction of some of the racist and colonial attitudes of the predominant culture in the early twentieth-century Pacific Northwest” (9, 13-14). Nonetheless, Richards concludes, “the Sacajawea dedication resisted other common forms of stereotyping and segregation. It represented a rare rhetorical performance by Anglo-Americans at the turn of the century that did not ignore American Indian women altogether, or make them objects of derision or blame” (14).

8. During this period, as an ongoing process of empire-building, dominant cultural constructions rendered the “Indian” a thing of the past. While it is impossible within the scope of this chapter to address the breadth of American Indian policy through the first decades of the twentieth century, the general movement was from a national strategy of extermination and removal to one of total assimilation. See generally, Drinnon, Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, Prucha, and Slotkin.

9. In 1951 an associate working with Attorney Ernest L. Wilkinson culled through the Bonnin family files stored at Wilkinson’s law firm and “destroyed most papers which related to individual cases and personal correspondence with various Indians throughout the country.” Gertrude Simmons Bonnin and Raymond T. Bonnin Collection, Register 3.

10. Letter from Alberta Weaver to Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin dated November 25, 1930.

11. Dear friend, Mrs. Weaver; ...About the program Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>,—I will be happy to appear in native costume, and give some Indian legends for Mr. William A. Miller, if he so desires....” Letter from Gertrude Bonnin to Alberta Weaver dated November 26, 1930.

12. Letter from Lavinia Engle to Gertrude Bonnin dated May 20, 1929.

13. Arthur C. Parker Papers as cited by Carpenter, “Detecting Indianness” and Davidson and Norris. Note too, Bonnin and her SAI colleagues were well aware of the political access that could be secured by agreeing to provide requested forms of “Indian” entertainment. Members of the SAI exploited this non-Native interest in “Indian” culture to advance political aims. See generally, Patterson.

14. Popular early twentieth-century perceptions of the “Indian” and “Indianness” will be discussed at much greater length in the next chapter. For background, see generally, Deloria and Green.

15. As the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (or “NAGPRA”) highlights, sacred Native American cultural artifacts and human remains also graced many museums as exotic curiosities at this time. See, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq. [Nov. 16, 1990].

16. A copy of the entire Ode can be found in the Appendix.

17. Plains communities refer to the Great Sioux Nation as the *Očhéthi Šakówinj* meaning “Seven Council Fires.” Each fire was symbolic of an *oyate* (people or nation). The seven nations that comprise the Sioux confederation include: Mdewakanton, Wahpeton, Wahpekute, Sisseton, Yankton, Yanktonai, and Teton or Lakota.

18. Rhetoric and composition, as a discipline, generally applies Lyons’s conception of rhetorical sovereignty to written forms of expression. While I believe that Lyons’s theoretical assertions apply to wider range of articulations, as Bonnin’s speech assumes its textual form, it more clearly falls within Lyons’s understanding of agency and resistance.

19. Curiously, the *Legrand Reporter* located in Legrand, Iowa published the entire text of Bonnin's speech on October 20, 1922 under the title, "Zitkala-Ša to Ohitika: South Dakota Adds a Stone to Washington Monument." One of the article's introductory paragraphs notes that "The ceremonies attending the placement of the stone were elaborate. But the feature of the occasion, from the viewpoint of many, was the reading of an original prose poem entitled "A Dacotah Ode to Washington" by Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin, an Indian woman from the Yankton agency now residing in Washington. Her name is Zitkala-Ša. The Sioux name for Washington is Ohitika—hence the caption of this article." More research must be done to confirm the origin of this text and its scholarly significance.



### CHAPTER THREE



#### (RE)TELLING STORY: STRATEGICALLY NEGOTIATING *ETHOS* AND ACTIVATING THE TEASE OF PRESENCE AS COLLABORATIVE FEMINIST RHETORIC

--“O sisters, work to that end; work in cooperation that the stain upon our country in the treatment of my people may be wiped out.”

Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, June 1921 <sup>1</sup>

In June of 1921, Bonnin spoke on several occasions to the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (the “GFWC”) during their week-long Biennial Council Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. Many credit her engaging skills as a speaker with the subsequent formation of the national Indian Welfare Committee within the GFWC which remained active for the next fifteen years. This chapter will argue that by carefully linking “Indian” concerns to popular discourses of Americanization within the GFWC, Bonnin helped to create a new story—a story she termed “Americanize the First American!” This narration, operating as a form of political rhetoric, helped to enlarge discourses of Americanization within the GFWC, raising awareness and ultimately facilitating widespread GFWC support for the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and the Indian New Deal of 1934. While this largely female-driven crusade clearly reinforced notions of native absence and erasure, it simultaneously refigured dominant discourses with meaningful traces of native presence, nationally, regionally, and locally.

Expanding upon prevailing notions of *ethos* and subsequently exploring conceptions of rhetoric as collaboration, this chapter will also rethink presence and absence in and through a series of networks of activism. This discussion builds upon feminist standpoint theory as theorized by Susan Jarratt and Nedra Reynolds, to further address Lindal Buchanan’s work on collaborative feminist rhetoric, and take up

considerations of intention, subjectivity, and rhetorical agency from multiple perspectives. This analysis moves from considerations of Bonnin as an individual rhetor engaging in multiple forms of presence, to a larger exploration of the moments of rhetorical “presence and absence” or the locus of effects—as traces of native presence—Bonnin’s speech acts may have initiated or facilitated across existing discourse communities throughout the GFWC, nationally and regionally, with diverse and often competing interests in advancing “Indian Welfare.”



#### Indian Welfare and the GFWC

An interest in “Indian reform,” focused primarily on complete assimilation, began to take hold in the United States during the 1880s, spurred to national heights with the publication of Helen Hunt Jackson’s scathing tract, *A Century of Dishonor*, in 1881. Women’s groups participating in these early reform efforts, particularly the Women’s National Indian Association (“WNIA”), tended to focus on education, missionary work, and the transformation of Indian homes to more closely resemble white, middle-class Victorian ideals related to family and domesticity. These assimilationist policies proved to be disastrous for Native communities who found themselves under even greater threat from provisions of the Dawes Act, which continued to allow land speculators to acquire millions of acres of previously “reserved” land.<sup>2</sup> With the closing of the frontier, a growing interest in greater expansion for both public and private interests continued to threaten land allotments held by Native communities throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, greatly undermining tribal life and deeply threatening already fragile economies.

In reaction, a new group of reformers emerged in the late 1910s calling for very different kinds of federal Indian policy—greater political rights, the restoration of tribal lands, freedom of religion, and some forms of self-determination. This group, led primarily by John Collier, continued to pursue Progressive policies over the next two decades that ultimately would lead to the Indian New Deal of 1934.

John Collier found an early ally in Stella Atwood, a wealthy clubwoman from Riverside, California, who worked to establish “Indian Welfare” committees within her city and her home state. In 1916 Atwood had accepted an appointment to her local draft board, and as historian Karin Huebner explains:

While serving on the draft board, Atwood realized that Indians were not citizens but wards of the state . . . (s)he discovered that Indians did not qualify for any benefits of citizenship (such as protection under the law or representative government); she also learned that the agents appointed by the federal Indian bureau in Washington, D.C. had near-total control over the Indians they supervised and that agents did not treat them so well. ‘On many reservations,’ she wrote ‘arrests [of Indians] are made with absolute disregard of the rights we hold so dear and for which we fight so valiantly.’<sup>3</sup>

Deeply moved by these experiences, Atwood urged all of the California GFWC affiliates to investigate local conditions and seek ways to improve health and education services for Native communities found within their vicinity through the formation of Indian Welfare committees.

Not all clubwomen within California or within the General Federation nationally shared Atwood's views nor her level of commitment. As Huebner explains, "many clubwomen demonstrated varying degrees of Anglo ethnocentrism. Some were Progressives, others were radicals, and many were split on the issue of assimilation" (342). Founded in 1890,<sup>4</sup> by 1921 the GFWC had become "perhaps the most prestigious women's organization in the country" (Welch 179). The *Official Register and Directory of Women's Clubs* from 1921 states that the GFWC consists of more than 2 million members at this time, all hailing from community clubs located throughout the United States (10). Distinguishing GFWC clubwomen from other female associations of the period organizing around Indian reform, Huebner argues:

For the most part, these clubwomen reformers were Christian women whose beliefs about the brotherhood of man shaped their adoption of the cause of Indian reform—although they did not emphasize the Christianization of the Indians. They were also Progressive women interested in social reform more generally who became aware of the problems of Indians living in and around their own white communities. Indian reform was thus one of many social problems that clubwomen addressed, as evidenced by the multitude of separate 'departments' in their clubs.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, most members of the GFWC supported a wide range of efforts aimed at social or civic improvement. Engaging in "Indian" reform became a small part of these much broader aims, and its importance to club members varied from region to region, locale to locale. Nonetheless, Stella Atwood managed, over time, to interest the Executive Board

of the GFWC in her agenda, causing Indian Welfare to become a prominent topic at the organization's national gathering in 1921.



#### Atwood, Bonnin, and the GFWC

Many scholars give Bonnin credit for “persuading” the GFWC to create the national Indian Welfare Committee in 1921 and, as discussed below, this may have been the case, but archival reviews indicate that Stella Atwood arranged for this initiative to be placed on the Federation's agenda and Atwood orchestrated most of the events addressing Indian Welfare during this national meeting. There is no evidence that Bonnin served as an “opening speaker” for any GFWC events during the 1921 gathering as Deborah Welch states (*The New Warriors* 47), and it would seem that the idea to create the Indian Welfare Committee stemmed largely from Atwood's activities prior to 1921, not Bonnin's. Bonnin is not mentioned by name on any pages of the Official Council Meeting Program. Instead, the 1921 program lists Atwood as the featured speaker for a presentation on “Indians of Today” during the closing session on Friday evening.

How Atwood and Bonnin met or began to work together remains unclear. Bonnin may have encountered Atwood in 1917 as she toured California on SAI business and gave a series of lectures in and around Riverside, Atwood's home base.<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, Bonnin may have met Atwood in D.C. at a women's rights meeting sponsored by the National Woman's Party.<sup>7</sup> How Bonnin came to attend the Council Meeting in Salt Lake City remains as a bit of a mystery as well. Susan Dominguez asserts that Bonnin appeared as Atwood's guest (xx). In a similar vein, Deborah Welch states that Bonnin agreed to appear with Atwood in Salt Lake City in order to encourage members of GFWC to establish the Committee (179). Certainly, Atwood and Bonnin shared similar

aims. Atwood may have felt that Bonnin, as an “Indian of Today,” could help garner support for her committee proposal, and as Deborah Welch asserts, Bonnin realized more generally that a substantial amount of publicity and recognition could be realized through women’s groups like the GFWC (179).

Bonnin’s own personal papers contain a typed note marked “Copy” which indicates that Bonnin herself had tried to secure access to the Federation from Washington, D.C. that spring. The note reads:

My dear Mrs. Hodgkins;-

Please give Mrs. Bonnin a few minutes of your time. She wants to take her Indian message to the Federated Clubs,-a message that has added importance from the knowledge of great and new injustice done to the Indians of which she can personally speak.

This Indian question is a crying need of the day, and until we women wipe this blot off of our public slate, we can never hold our heads up as a “Free People.” What if Europe knew of this stain! Virtual slaves living segregated [sic] in our midst,-one of us but apart. She has charts telling of what should be done for the Indian, and what is being done.

The Indian Bureau, created for the guardianship of the Indian, has forgotten its trusteeship and it is now with its present head looking at questions from the government’s standpoint, and the Indian is virtually deserted.

The women must act!

And Mrs. Bonnin comes as Jean D'Arc to lead her people to  
Citizenship.

Will you help her?

You have been given so much power that you may help.

Cordially and gratefully,

(SGD) Esther P. Hitz <sup>8</sup>

The “dear” Mrs. Hodgkins receiving this note is likely to have been Marie Wilkinson Hodgkins who served at that time as a regional Chair for the GFWC and represented the entire District of Columbia. Also active within the GFWC, Esther Porter Hitz appears to have written this note to Hodgkins, but the cadence and diction sound very much like Bonnin. For example, phrases exclaiming, “The women must act!” and further encouraging women to “wipe this blot off of our public slate,” as well as the reference to Bonnin as “Jeanne D'Arc” ready to “lead her people to Citizenship” all echo a bit of the sentimental, highly emotional, slightly romanticized language associated with Bonnin’s expository writing during this period and her activist style, more generally.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that Bonnin wrote or helped to write the note as she encouraged Hitz to make contact with Executive members of the GFWC on Bonnin’s behalf. All heavily involved in the war effort, Hitz, Hodgkins, and Bonnin are likely to have known each other through these relief activities or through other political and social events in and around Washington.<sup>10</sup>

Whether the note was actually sent, or what response the note provoked from GFWC members at the national level is unknown, but the note is significant in two respects. It confirms that Bonnin wanted to forge connections within the GFWC shortly before June, 1921 and it reveals some of the strategic rhetorical maneuvers Bonnin

employed to reach this powerful GFWC audience. Here, we see an “Indian message” cast as “new” and specifically directed toward women who “must act” to support “Free people” (as opposed to “slaves”). This final phrase references female-led abolition activism just decades earlier, reminding the note’s readers of the very public role women can play with respect to race-based concerns. Finally, connecting these efforts to Christianity and Christian iconicity (“saving” and the image of Jeanne D’Arc) as well as notions of “Citizenship” all neatly link Bonnin’s activist agenda, as explained below, to the GFWC’s growing interest in Americanization.



#### The 1921 Council Meeting, Americanization, and Citizenship

Serving in her second year as the GFWC President, Alice Ames Winter authorized and directed many of the Council Meeting events in Salt Lake City. After graduating from Wellesley College, Winter had moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she founded and headed the Minneapolis Woman’s Club. In 1914, she accepted a national role within the GFWC Literature Division, but with the start of World War I, Winter became the national Chair of GFWC’s prominent Americanization effort and then ascended to the role of GFWC President in 1920. With her guidance, Americanization and American Citizenship continued to be principal themes for the GFWC through 1924.

Indeed, organized around the theme, “Americanization: The Flames of Active Citizenship,” the GFWC held their 1921 Biennial Council Meeting at the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City from June 13 through June 18. The GFWC’s national print publication, the *General Federation News*, later reported that attendance during the week reached over 600 clubwomen representing more than 13, 000 local and regional GFWC clubs.<sup>11</sup> The Federation held its opening reception in the portico of the Utah State Capitol building on



Monday night and concluded its work in Assembly Hall on Thursday with a formal evening session that included with a dinner, music, and a closing speech by Professor Levi Edgar Young from the University of Utah who spoke on the “Idealism of the West and the Significance of the West to the Nation.”

Dr. Young’s speech—which appears from its title to generally uphold the benefits of settler colonialism—fit neatly within the Council Meeting’s overall agenda and its focus that year on Americanization. Seeds for a theme addressing “Americanization” had been laid at least three years before during a national Board of Directors meeting held in 1918. At that time, this GFWC Board directed all of their clubwomen to adopt Americanization as a “special line of work” to be undertaken by all departments within the Federation.<sup>12</sup> The Board supported this resolution with the belief that “the future of our republic rests upon its power of assimilation, the power to weld its cosmopolitan population into one ‘nation indivisible’—to make a contented, a united, a loyal America” (“Suggested Program” 4). Between 1918 and 1921 the GFWC implemented a number of far-reaching initiatives designed to “reconstruct” American society through its campaign for Americanization. These efforts included developing prescribed reading lists for children and adults, preparing strictly formatted club programs and discussion questions for local clubs to implement, and developing patriotic plays and pageants. The GFWC hoped these efforts would contribute usefully to an ongoing national dialogue regarding citizenship and acceptable forms of American identity that continued to grow after World War I. A perceived threat from immigration prevailed well into the 1920s as displaced Eastern and Southern European populations sought refuge and asylum in the United States. This population influx led to an intense national focus on assimilation and

cultivation of a particular kind of “good” and obedient American citizen produced through efficient forms of mass education.<sup>13</sup>

These prevailing discourses of Americanization intimately connected to “proper” notions of citizenship reached well beyond concerns for immigrants and tended to influence “scientifically proven” race-based aims for social reform as well. For example, in his popular book from 1919, *Essentials of Americanization*, author and doctor of sociology Emory Stephen Borgardus, explains his concerns regarding Americanization for “The American Indian”:

For decades the effects of European civilization and the methods of the newcomers, instead of raising the Indians to the civilized level, made them more disorderly and less civilized than they were before. . . . the Indians are being Americanized very slowly. . . . They have frequently adopted the vices of the white man and become notorious for their shiftlessness . . . . The Citizenship status of Indian is uncertain . . . . We shall work out education methods that will slowly transform Indian communities from the hunting to the agricultural stage of civilization, utilizing chiefly Indian leaders. (109-118)

Francis Paul Prucha, and others, clearly document the ways that discourses of Americanization supported ethnocentrism and policies of total assimilation with respect to Native populations throughout the country during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century.<sup>14</sup> Arguably, GFWC’s campaign for Americanization reinforced these race-based hierarchies but also provided a limited platform for new voices seeking to enter into this conversation.<sup>15</sup> For Bonnin, the GFWC interest in Americanization

provided a means for sparking interest in Native concerns, but this rhetorical opening would need to be negotiated very carefully. Initially Bonnin needed to avoid unnecessarily reinforcing the totalizing aspects of Americanization working to destroy Native culture. Then, as discussed below, she had to navigate other widely circulating discourses that constructed and positioned “Indians” in very particular, very limiting ways.



#### Bonnin (and Atwood) Speak to the GFWC

Evidence of an actual appearance by Bonnin at the GFWC Council Meeting in 1921 is hard to find, but traces can be discerned by tracking references to Stella Atwood. Contrary to popular conceptions, Bonnin appears to have delivered some form of public address on at least three occasions during the five-day meeting, and not on just one occasion as scholars tend to assume. Bonnin and Atwood first appear to speak during a Board of Directors meeting on Monday afternoon held as a planning session before the official opening ceremonies on Tuesday. According to reports printed in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, a paper closely following GFWC events throughout the entire week, Indian Welfare served as the main topic during the Monday afternoon session. After hearing some “interesting and forceful pleas” the Board of Directors agreed to support the creation of a new Department for Indian Welfare and further agreed to place the matter to a vote before the assembled Federation members by the end of the week.<sup>16</sup> *The Tribune* notes that “Mrs. Atwood made the principal address on ‘Indian Welfare,’ and it was further discussed by Dr. Marianna Gertolt of San Francisco, Mrs. J.E. Flynn of Colorado, Mrs. Jensen of Colorado, and Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin of Washington, D.C” (13). The

Board also appointed Atwood as chair of a new committee charged with overseeing the establishment of this new department within the Federation.

Pursuing an Indian Welfare agenda proved to be controversial within some corners of the GFWC, particularly for women from New Mexico and Utah, where battles over federal Indian policy, water, mining, and land rights would continue to grow over the next decade. In her address at an earlier Executive Committee session on Monday morning, local host and Utah GFWC President, Nancy Albaugh Leatherwood, signals her concerns in a carefully worded reference to the pending issue of Indian Welfare scheduled for discussion throughout the week:

The time has arrived when we should study carefully the problems involved in dealing with our nation's wards, the Indian. Once we have found what is the just course to pursue, the women should stand as a unit in securing new legislation, if such is needed, or the enforcement of existing laws. We should stand firmly against either the exploiting of Indians or the government.”<sup>17</sup>

While acknowledging concerns exist, Leatherwood advises the Federation to proceed slowly, with caution—engaging in study, and not necessarily action—supporting legislation only if it is “needed” and would not exploit existing government interests. Leatherwood’s advice would not be followed completely during this national meeting, but Leatherwood continues to oppose an Indian Welfare agenda and ultimately manages to thwart Atwood’s efforts, particularly during GFWC national meetings held in 1924 and 1928.<sup>18</sup>

The June, 1921 official program of events for the formal reception held on Wednesday evening in Assembly Hall does not list Bonnin or Atwood as featured speakers, but the *Salt Lake Tribune* discusses comments made by Bonnin from the speaker's platform that evening. The session opened with harp music and brief talks calling for continued support for men and women who had served in the armed forces. As described in the *Tribune*:

A contralto solo by Miss Florence Jepperson of Provo was the next number on the program and then the congregation heard an address by a Sioux Indian.

Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin) spoke on the topic: 'Americanizing the American.'

Mrs. Bonnin described the pitiful plight of the Indian on his reservation without citizenship. She told of his response to recent calls to arms and pleaded that the women of America turn their attention to the first American and attempt to Americanize the Indian.<sup>19</sup>

From our contemporary perspective, these references by Bonnin to citizenship may seem to work against conceptions of sovereignty and self-determination, but during this period, Bonnin consistently rejected assimilation. Her vision of enfranchisement embraced a kind of dual citizenship that retained notions of tribal sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> She remained convinced that political representation and democratic forms of accountability were needed to end inequitable and corrupt vestiges of ward status and were the most effective means for advancing indigenous interests.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, given GFWC's great interest in Americanization and necessarily "American" forms of citizenship, the *Tribune's* reference to this second speech act by Bonnin confirms that on at least one occasion Bonnin moved beyond discussions of an Indian Welfare committee in order to work within the larger *topos* of Americanization to leverage greater forms of interest and concern for tribal communities. There is no mention of Atwood in records addressing Wednesday evening ceremonies. Arguably, Bonnin used this "unfettered" rhetorical space to create a conversation that moved beyond Atwood's concerns related to Indian Welfare. Bonnin may have mentioned Atwood's key term, "Indian Welfare," but if she did, the *Tribune* staff member reporting on this event observed a focus on Americanization, indicating that Bonnin used the speaking opportunity to move out past Atwood's agenda and create a larger rhetorical space for herself. The closing address that evening from President Alice Ames Winter focused specifically on themes related to Americanization and citizenship in a speech entitled, "Citizen or Politician?"<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Bonnin may have also known from the pre-printed program that her rhetorical aims might be most effectively served by linking directly to themes subsequently reinforced within President Winter's popular speech.

The third speaking appearance for Bonnin occurs on Friday evening, June 17 during the final evening session of the GFWC national meeting. Nancy Leatherwood presided over this event and the pre-printed programs lists "Mrs. H.A. Atwood" as one of featured speakers addressing "Indians of Today."<sup>23</sup> Again, Bonnin is not mentioned in this official program, so her appearance, at a minimum, did not follow the same routine or official channels that brought Mrs. Atwood to the program, if not the podium. Archival records reviewed to date have not produced any evidence regarding Atwood's talk that

night, but as discussed more fully below, many utterances are attributed to Bonnin. It remains difficult to discern from this fragmentary record whether these textual artifacts capture speeches made on Friday evening, or earlier in the week. What we do know is that during this closing Friday night session the GFWC voted to establish an Indian Welfare Advisory Committee, with Atwood serving as the Chair, and Leatherwood serving as Vice-Chair. Placed under the supervision of the GFWC Department of Public Welfare, the purpose of the new Indian Welfare Committee would be to “work through the 50 State Federation for citizenship rights for the American Indian and for protection of their property.”<sup>24</sup> The fact that Leatherwood secured a leadership position on the Committee, and may have succeeded in “demoting” Indian Welfare from Department to Committee status in this final vote, speaks to the deep divides existing within the GFWC and indeed throughout the country with respect to federal Indian policy. Describing these events in her later book summarizing the history of the GFWC, Mildred White Wells writes: “One of the dramatic moments in GFWC history came in 1921, when an Indian Welfare committee was authorized. When this announcement was made, President Winter called to the platform the full-blooded Sioux woman who had pled for such action—Sitkala-Sa [sic] . . . . Tears rolled down the cheeks of the Indian woman as she cried, ‘It has begun. Nothing now can stop it. We shall have help’” (217).

Despite divisions within the GFWC over federal Indian policy, Bonnin left Salt Lake City with a sense of accomplishment. In her “Personal History,” Bonnin describes the events of the week in the following manner:

In June, 1921, Mrs. Bonnin attended the meeting of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs held in Salt Lake City, and plead [sic] for

citizenship for all Indians. She was instrumental in causing the Federation of Women's clubs to create for the first time a department of Indian Welfare as a part of their work. Thereafter Mrs. Bonnin was invited to speak before clubs in various states under the auspices of the Women's Federation; and her appeal for justice to the Indian aroused interest and sympathy; and directed public attention to all legislation affecting her people.<sup>25</sup>

The archival record confirms that Bonnin did indeed help facilitate the founding of the GFWC Indian Welfare Committee. She also strived to develop greater awareness among GFWC women regarding the actual goals and aims of existing indigenous communities, and further enhanced her opportunities for public speaking throughout the county in the years to come.

Remaining portions of this discussion will review utterances attributed to Bonnin in much closer detail and attempt to evaluate their impact and effect. Before taking up these final considerations regarding Bonnin's speech acts, however, one more aspect of Bonnin's rhetorical production in Salt Lake City during the summer of 1921 must be reviewed. As we note that terms used throughout the week to identify Bonnin move from "Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin" on Monday to "a full-blooded Sioux Indian" by Friday evening, we must pause to consider how Bonnin needed to carefully navigate prevailing perceptions of race, embedded within the popular discourses and ideologies of Americanization, certainly, but found within dominant discourses and ideologies of the American West during that week in Salt Lake City as well.





## Navigating Absence: Race, Americanization, and the American West

Too often, but particularly during the early twentieth century, discourses and ideologies addressing what it meant to be “American” or be an “American citizen” also worked to renounce, erase, or appropriate Native identity and Native culture. Connecting fantasies related to race with prevailing notions of national identity began well before America’s founding and certainly continue today. As Philip Deloria observes:

Race has, of course, been a characteristic American obsession—and the racial imagination has been at work on many different groups of people, Indians included. But Americans—particularly white Americans—have been similarly fixated on defining on themselves as a nation . . . (and) those national definitions have engaged racialized and gendered Indians in curious and contradictory ways. (5)

Essentially, dominant American culture constructs, claims, and enacts a variety of myths or fantasies about “Indians” as its struggles to define itself as a nation, and as individuals. These racial fantasies cast “Indians” as part of a romantic past, a past that emphasizes the passing of a vanishing race to make way for other, “more progressive” or “more modern” or “more fit” races. Deloria points out that the emergence of “science,” particularly as ethnography, allowed for an acknowledgment of the ongoing presence of “Indians,” but still defined those individuals as part of a distant, primitive, and romanticized past, rather than the present (91). Dominant American culture consistently employs these false constructions to empower itself and deny power to actual people. While these hegemonic practices produce powerful tensions in American society between

the ideal of equality on the one hand and the very real inequalities engendered by hierarchical constructs of race on the other, they also cause marginalized individuals to live and reside within a series of unstable symbolic fields.

In each of her appearances before the GFWC members gathered in Salt Lake City that June, Bonnin had to engage, refashion, and redeploy these symbolic fields of representation if she hoped to impart a larger (enlarged) message regarding the need for concern, interest, and civic action related to improving actual conditions for indigenous communities. At the same time, the 1921 GFWC Council Meeting environment and landscape—discursively and materially—worked actively and continually to erase native presence in multiple ways.

We can first observe this trend in the material culture—the art, books, and printed sheet music—selected to enhance this national GFWC event. For a number of years, the GFWC campaign for Americanization and “appropriately American” forms of citizenship included art, music, and pageant programs designed for “uplift” and education. Training materials for local clubs and dramatic productions as pageants frequently highlighted Western Eurocentric artistic forms, primarily referencing Early Greek or nineteenth-century French culture. Within these programs, “primitive” art forms were often placed in juxtaposition with “elevated” cultural artifacts in order to foster an understanding of modernity and human progress as a linear form of evolution that had successfully moved beyond simplistic forms of primitivism associated with the past. All of these associations with native absence can be seen during the June, 1921 GFWC meeting. Thursday morning sessions devoted to Fine Arts, for example, explored themes such as “Literature and Living” and “A Few Possibilities in the Study of Art and Literature in the Federated

Clubs.” During these sessions, the Fine Arts Department within the Federation “outlined a course of study for better citizenship as applicable to art and offered original ideas through pageantry for promotion of a national appreciation of art.”<sup>26</sup> These efforts encouraged more reading of approved books, rather than travel in order to “gain knowledge of other races and countries;”<sup>27</sup> and urged clubwomen to start a music hour in their homes with . . . good old-folk songs of America, which our Americanization work has taught us really are the folk songs of the whole world.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, during this particular GFWC event, routine displays of “elevated” and “progressive” cultural forms as necessary training for Americanization and American Citizenship worked to deny the value of non-Western cultures and fostered totalizing forms of assimilation designed to flatten or erase meaningful cultural differences.

These limiting practices undertaken in June of 1921 occurred within an even more complicated setting, as local GFWC hosts *also* worked diligently to highlight the cultural importance and significance of America’s West. From its inception, the American West, as a potent cultural symbol has simultaneously invoked masculine individualism, a transgressive kind of bohemianism, cultural imperialism, and fantasies of American exceptionalism (Comer 238-242). These coded references work through critical forms of “othering,” i.e., masculine rather than feminine, anti-modern as opposed to modern, cultured as opposed to savage, etc. Powerful associations embedded within “the American West” worked overtly and even subliminally to deny native presence aligning neatly with the already existing discourses of Americanization so prevalent at the GFWC national meeting that June. Local hosts, for example, arranged for a series of afternoon speakers addressing the “story of the building of the west.” These speakers discussed art,

literature, music and other educational programs most exemplifying “western institutions and ideals.”<sup>29</sup> Hoping to draw attention to the fact that “great art. . . although it is distinctly American, (can be) done by westerners,” local GFWC hosts also filled six rooms on the mezzanine of the Utah Hotel, including the ballroom and the presidential suite, with exhibits of “painting, statuary, and Indian art.”<sup>30</sup> A significant portion of the art on display came from the Taos School of Art, produced by non-Native artists “of the conservative and of the daring types” said to “feel, see, know, dream, and breathe, and live the life of the Indian they portray.”<sup>31</sup> During the week, other displays of Indian basketry also attracted unusual interest.<sup>32</sup>

Such displays worked continually to present Native peoples as curious objects from a primitive past and confirm native absence. As art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson observes about displays of “Indian” art during this period:

[T]his simulated presence of the original makers and users of the objects on display highlights their assumed absence from modern domestic space. . . . The ability to collect such objects is a hallmark of modernity presumed available only to European Americans. (15-16)

Beyond this artistic display that served to “distance” Native peoples in curious and objectifying ways, the theme of the American West continued through Friday evening, as discussed earlier, with Dean Bryan Cummings from the University of Arizona and Professor Levi Edgar Young of the University of Utah, each speaking—“the former telling of the archaeology of the West and the latter speaking of the idealism of the west and its significance to the nation.”<sup>33</sup>

Bonnin appeared on the same podium with Cummings and Young, perhaps in Native dress, but no clear evidence uncovered to date confirms what she may have worn throughout the week. Whatever she wore, Bonnin appeared as a guest of Stella Atwood, under the billing, “Indians of Today”—a title selected, perhaps, to combat the forms of native absence embedded within circulating discourses and ideologies of Americanization and the American West. That is to say, in order to become an “Indian” *of Today*, Bonnin needed first to distance herself from representations of “Indians” as curious, collectible figures from the past, associated with the art on display and perhaps discussions of the archaeology of the West as articulated by Dean Cummings. Then, Bonnin had to maneuver around the discourses of Americanization which continued to position the “Indian” as some kind of social construction existing beyond or apart from the “idealism” and “significance” of modern, progressive, contemporary, assimilated American spaces. Both discourses left Bonnin in a liminal state, caught between at least two false fields of signification.



#### Further Navigating “Indian Play” in Order to Play the Indian (Princess)

Speaking from an already unstable discursive position, Bonnin also shares the stage on Friday evening with two non-Native individuals who “performed” as “Indians”—white individuals who enacted “Indian” roles as theatrical play, creating yet *another* layer of native absence. News summaries of the Friday night program praise the “group of Indian songs sung in costume by Harold Frasee, a noted dramatic tenor, and Mrs. C.C. Dailey, (who) concluded the program, leaving lasting memory of the pathos of the real Westerner, the American Indian . . . .”<sup>34</sup> Not only did Bonnin have to navigate discourses and ideologies of Americanization and the American West as discussed above,

but also, as we see most pointedly in this last reference, the ability to “play Indian” allows non-Native individuals like Harold Frasee and Mrs. C.C. Dailey to conflate “the West” with constructions of “the Indian,” further eliding race, sentimentality, and histories of genocide into even more powerful forms of erasure and absence.<sup>35</sup> This dangerous conflation occurs with multiple layers of signification occurring simultaneously on stage that June night in 1921. Discourses and ideologies of Americanization and the American West, as discussed above, map neatly onto prevailing conceptions of “Indianness” and help to fuel a popular early twentieth-century fondness for Indian play.

For as Philip Deloria reminds us, “Indianness” functions as a foundation for further imagining, and subsequently performing, domination or power in American culture. Notions of “Indianness” have historically invoked identities that are unquestionably viewed within dominant culture as quintessentially “American,” for this social construction continually references a timeless, unchanging, non-threatening world. For generations of Americans caught up in relativisms that challenged nation, community, and self-hood, fantasizing about “Indians” as markers of something undeniably real also allows for a kind of psychic space associated with “Indianness” that provides opportunities within dominant culture for transformation, rebellion, and creation (Deloria 183-184). Indian play becomes space within dominant culture for working out contradictory longings for freedom and fixed truth, enhanced here within discourses and ideologies of the American West. Moreover, engaging in play—through singing, dressing in costume, staging a pageant—makes all of the racial imaginings seem true, this physical play makes the fantasies *real* (184).

Thus, to be read legibly by the GFWC audience assembled on Friday evening, Bonnin faced two additional performance-related hurdles. First, she had to distinguish herself, or set herself apart from the simulated “real Indians” that were “played” by Harold Frasee and Mrs. C.C. Dailey. Then, Bonnin had to act appropriately “Indian” enough to gain her audience’s trust; she had to play the Indian (Princess), so to speak. Rayna Green explains how racialized “Indian” constructions in American culture also impose a particular kind of gendered construction upon many Native women:

Always called a Princess (or Chieftain's Daughter), she, like Pocahontas, has to violate the wishes and customs of her own ‘barbarous’ people to make good the rescue . . . . often out of ‘Christian sympathy.’ Nearly all the ‘good’ Princess figures are converts, and they cannot bear to see their fellow Christians slain by ‘savages.’ The Princess is ‘civilized’ to illustrate her native nobility, most pictures portray her as white, darker than the Europeans, but more Caucasian than her fellow natives.<sup>36</sup>

Bonnin was no stranger to this “Princess” construction, for women’s organizations continued to advertise Bonnin’s speaking engagements during this era as the appearance of an “Indian Princess.”<sup>37</sup> A February, 1924 newspaper clipping from *Indianapolis Star*, for example, notes that “Princess Zitkala-Sa” will be speaking during an upcoming luncheon for the local Women’s Department Club [See Figure 7].

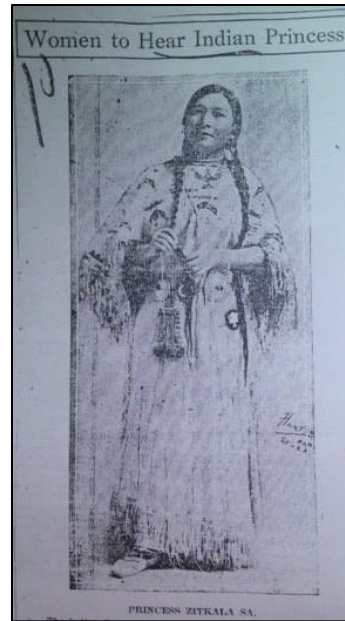


Fig. 7. “Women to Hear Indian Princess—Princess Zitkala-Sa”  
*Indianapolis Star*, February 21, 1924

Viewed from these perspectives, we begin to understand how perceptions of Bonnin had shifted by the end of the week at the GFWC national meeting in Salt Lake City from “Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin” to some kind of “Indian” construction. This shift invokes both a supplement and a lack. Mrs. Bonnin assumes more rhetorical agency with her GFWC audience by the end of the week, as a “full-blooded Sioux Indian” crying tears of gratitude for the “saving” impulses this Indian construction engenders for her GFWC audience. And yet, the construction is at least partially false, to the extent that Bonnin is read by her audience, as a fantastical figure from the past and/or standing before them as a helpless figure, in need of their rescue. Her very presence on stage confirms false, unstable signifiers—that is to say, Mrs. C.C. Dailey in costume and Bonnin are viewed with the same equivalency—dressed up, Mrs. Dailey is an “Indian,” and Bonnin is merely the “full-blooded” version. Bonnin becomes more “real” than the simulated presentation by Frasee and Dailey, which the audience “knew” to be “play,” but she still



remains a fantasy as she appears before her audience as an “Indian” or as an “Indian Princess”—both unstable, romanticized constructions associated with weakness and a vanishing or vanished past.

Oddly, this complex socio-cultural mapping onto Bonnin provides a certain kind of legibility and agency, if not authority, for Bonnin as she speaks from within dominant culture. Paradoxically, as discussed below, these hegemonic projections ultimately could all be fused together in productive ways in order to create a significant rhetorical opening for Bonnin. By this time, Bonnin clearly understood how a radical potential for limited forms of native presence could be embedded within or exploited through dominant culture’s fascination with Indian play. Historian Michelle Wick Patterson’s essay from 2002, “‘Real’ Indian Songs: The Society of American Indians and the Use of Native American Culture as a Means of Reform,” explores efforts undertaken by members of the SAI in 1920s (which included Bonnin), to deploy “Indian” forms of entertainment as “real” culture in order to interest white audiences in actual policy issues and concerns. One example Patterson describes involves the 1914 SAI meeting in Madison, Wisconsin. SAI President Sherman Coolidge disliked “trivializing” SAI concerns through these false simulations and hoped to avoid this kind of production,<sup>38</sup> but local hosts pressured him to allow non-Native individuals to act as a “real” Indians and be accompanied by “Indian” children who sang “along wild lines” because the anticipated non-Native audience would expect this kind of “entertainment” (44). Patterson argues that the SAI learned to navigate these kinds of requests by embedding political discourse within these performances, and subsequently exploited non-Native interest in Indian culture in order to advance their goals of citizenship and equality within mainstream society (45).



Fig. 8. “Indian Group.” Artist Carnival and Book Fair, Pen Women’s League, April 1920.

There is also a picture of Bonnin appearing in a tableau entitled “Indian Group” for the Artist Carnival and Book Fair held by the Pen’s Women League of Washington, D.C. in 1920 [See Fig. 8]. The picture includes Miss Lucy Byrd Mock, Mrs. Wayne E. Wheeler, and Master Theodore Tiller, Jr.<sup>39</sup> It is not too much of a stretch to read a sense of irony in Bonnin’s direct gaze for the camera, particularly when we note the artificial, “costumed” nature of this presentation for the non-Native individuals appearing within the tableau. We do not know for certain if Bonnin appeared in any tableaux during her week in Salt Lake City, although that would appear unlikely, and the existing archival record reviewed to date does not definitively establish her manner of dress throughout the week. Nonetheless, no matter what she wore during that week in June of 1921, the specific rhetorical context found in Salt Lake City during that week called for Bonnin to

engage in a series of discursive maneuvers, to essentially oscillate between the false and something more “real” in order to craft a coherent, meaningful message for her audience that worked to do more than just reinforce ideologies of dominance and oppression. This kind of legibility required a multidimensional form of rhetorical subjectivity—an ability to invoke multiple selves, speaking from multiple positions—credibly—and within the space of each performance or each speech act undertaken that week.



### *Ethos* as Strategically Negotiating Essence

Modern conceptions of *ethos* arise primarily from three modes of persuasion—*pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos*—as first identified by Aristotle. Throughout his treatise, *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that effective public discourse appeals to emotion as *pathos*, and reason or logic as *logos*, and further requires the instantiation of some kind of authoritative or credible presence or essence, as *ethos*. Of these three modes, Aristotle views *ethos* as most important, particularly in those rhetorical situations where “exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided” (Jasinski 229; Aristotle 38-39). Operating as a complex and recently contested rhetorical term, *ethos* is defined most frequently as “character” —a term which popularizes but oversimplifies Aristotle’s original concept.

Many Early Greek rhetors adopted Aristotelian models derived from *On Rhetoric* which encouraged young men to learn and construct “ethical” forms of public speaking. These forms grew out of speech habits and practices identified and categorized by Aristotle as those most able during a speech performance or a speech appearance to foster trustworthiness and credibility for an audience (38-39). Later rhetoricians equated the skillful practice of rhetoric as *ethos* with the development of “good” character,

emphasizing the need for speakers to maintain certain kinds of reputation in order to be heard. Quintilian most exemplifies this strand of thinking about *ethos*, arguing in *Institutio Oratorio* for a Roman ideal as the “good man skilled in speaking well” (12.1.1). With this historical shift, character and ethical considerations as credibility or believability came to be gauged by the way one lived, or the lifestyle one inherited, and not only by the way a person spoke in any given instance. Over time, prevailing views of *ethos* within Western Eurocentric cultures tended to shift from this Roman period to more contemporary eras yet again. These shifts produced a focus on style and considerations of various rhetorical devices or tropes defined to be evidence of virtue—simplicity, modesty, solemnity, vehemence, and so on—considerations rhetors reviewed, adopted, and mastered to exhibit evidence of appropriate character, discursively and literally.<sup>40</sup> As contemporary rhetorical scholar S. Michael Halloran suggests, in its simplest form, *ethos* operates now in many ways as an argument for authority, as “an argument that says in effect, ‘Believe me because I am the sort of (person) whose word you can believe’” (60). Wrestling with what it might mean to become “the sort” of rhetor an audience believes, regards, accepts, or embraces through civic discourse, Western Eurocentric considerations of rhetoric today continue to take up complex questions surrounding *ethos* and its relationship to prevailing notions of self, identity, perception, and language.

The preceding assertion by Halloran, for example, highlights a longstanding tradition within the Western Eurocentric canon to emphasize stable, singular notions of self and the ability of the stable self to construct “good” or “ethical” rhetorical performances. Citing Paul Smith, Susan Jarratt observes that many prominent voices in rhetoric and composition are still invested in the concept of the individual as “source and

agent of conscious action or meaning” (“Splitting Image” 37). These time-honored exhortations imply that discourse as a public art begins with a unified self that engages in often singular or unambiguous purposes. As Marshall Alcorn explains, traditional formations of *ethos* implicitly define self and self-construction as fairly restrictive concepts:

A ‘person’ is what he or she strives and learns to be. As a ‘person’ learns and repeatedly plays a role (hopefully a ‘good’ role), he or she becomes the person embodied by that role. The self is thus an effect of learning, a coherent behavioral role acquired through repeated performances. (5)

From our contemporary perspective, these traditional models fail in their insistence upon constructions of self as a more or less fixed entity over time and notions of virtue as clearly discernible and generally unambiguous. As Alcorn notes, “The Aristotelian view envisions an overly strong self able to choose freely its own nature, able to become whatever model it can imagine. Such a notion . . . cannot account for the limitations of human nature—those moments when people encounter their lack of freedom, their inability to be and do what they imagine” (6). This kind of rhetorical construction, for example, fails to account for the limitations a rhetor, like Bonnin, may encounter as she attempts to speak credibly or authoritatively within discursive spaces working actively to deny her very existence.

Writing in 1963, Wayne Booth first identified the term “rhetorical stance” as a new means for theorizing communicative relationships beyond Aristotle’s modes of persuasion. According to Booth, the three elements at work in any communicative effort include available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the

audience, and the voice, or the implied character of the speaker” (141). Rather than focusing solely on the presence or absence of three modes, scholars began using the concept of “rhetorical stance” to examine the “positionality” of speakers and writers in relation to their audience, topic, and situational context. Booth’s articulation of “rhetorical stance” allows scholars to consider more fluid, more contingent forms of rhetorical production as speakers and writers adopt or issue articulations from particular positions or stances—through considerations of rhetorical aim, audience, subject, and contextual circumstances—that can be almost endlessly adjusted, reformatted, and reworked.

Responding to postmodern and poststructural developments within the humanities related to self, perception, identity, and language more generally, late twentieth-century scholarship in rhetoric continued to expand upon these considerations of “positionality” and “stance,” pushing traditional views of *ethos* in perhaps more nebulous, but certainly more fluid directions. Postmodernism’s rejection of Cartesian philosophical orderings further undermined scholarly acceptance of stable identities and fixed definitions of self within the field of rhetoric and composition, while poststructuralist thought, read particularly through Saussure, Barthes, Derrida, Marx, and Freud, further decentered and fragmented popular assumptions about self, intention, and language. Rather than being the point of enunciation, the “I” or “the self” engaging in discourse here becomes a point of intersection between various cultural, linguistic, and psychic forces often believed to be lying beyond conscious control (Baumlin and Baumlim xxi; Jarratt and Reynolds 37-38).

Despite this turn to poststructural theory within the humanities more generally, many scholars situated within rhetoric and composition continue to embrace an understanding of “I” or “the self” that recognizes some degree of will and intention. Nonetheless, they recognize that the language and the forms of self-representation a speaker intentionally selects may still be limited or prohibited, consciously or unconsciously, by one’s own historicity, by one’s own time and culture—by ideological constructions and specific socio-cultural contexts deeply affecting will, intention, and rhetorical ability. Contemporary studies of *ethos* continue to acknowledge the presence and play of ideology within a speaker’s or a writer’s self-representations and further attempt to examine how context and ideology specifically affect identity, subjectivity, representation, and “ethical” forms of possible self-representation. Indeed, James Baumlim observes:

As (Mikhail) Bakhtin suggests, all acts of discourse must speak or write themselves against a background of prior voices, many of which claim an inviolate political, intellectual, religious authority. Before one speaks, in other words, one confronts the already spoken, which can itself assume many guises: a text, an institution, a tradition, a reigning theory, or more insidiously, a particular gender, color, or class. The terms are often equated; loosely speaking, to have *ethos* is to be an authority.

Needless to say, the issue of authority raises questions concerning the perilously liminal status of the marginalized or minority speaker. If authority lies in the dominant cultural voice, must such a speaker impersonate that voice? Is such an impersonation an act of empowerment?

Does it serve ultimately to subvert authority? Or does it serve simply to reinscribe and preserve dominant political culture? (Baumlin and Baumlin xxix)

Recent inquiries within feminist rhetorical studies take up these specific questions of *ethos* for marginalized rhetors. To address complex questions of ideology, power, and issues of authority related to rhetorical production and rhetorical constraint, these scholars explore ways that *ethos* may be ethically developed and deployed as an intersubjective and continually reconstructed rhetorical form, inventively moving between and among spaces of empowerment and spaces of marginalization. This scholarship focuses on contingency, fluidity, and specific sites of production to examine *ethos in situ*—that is to say how, minute-to-minute, forms of rhetorical *ethos* might be constructed, negotiated, and revised to support rhetorical efficacy and agency as a tool for resistance and social change. Thus, despite its patriarchal, Western Eurocentric origins, feminist recovery in rhetoric continues to embrace *ethos* as a useful theoretical construct. Instead of abandoning this concept, feminist scholars maintain that closely reviewing *ethos* as it shifts or expands to account for communication from marginalized positions within social formations can be a powerful analytical tool (Foss, Foss, and Griffin, “Transforming Rhetoric” at 130).

Leading feminist rhetorical scholars Susan Jarratt and Nedra Reynolds, in particular, envision *ethos* as a kind of contingent essence that speaks from constantly changing “sites” as the person engaging in an utterance is being positioned by one’s audience and simultaneously seeking to reposition oneself and one’s listeners. Jarratt and Reynolds aim to reread traditional forms of *ethos* through feminist theory as a means for



refiguring the ethics of *ethos* beyond its accepted formations and rethink subjectivity as it relates to concepts of *ethos* in speaking and writing (40). Jarratt and Reynolds look to Linda Alcoff to define “positionality” and “stance” as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than the locus of an already determined set of values (50). They subsequently adopt feminist standpoint theory as it acknowledges “the positions women have historically occupied off the centers of power” (50). They find that the ideas of place, position, and standpoint in feminist theory offer a way for reconceiving *ethos* as an ethical political tool—as a way of claiming and taking responsibility for our positions in the world, for the ways we see, for the places from which we speak (52). Ultimately,

(These) feminist theories . . . participate in a ‘politics of location’ . . . . The selves envisioned or implied by these theories are split but embodied, just as the classical orator created an *ethos* for each particular occasion but always himself stood before the crowd to speak . . . . Appearing in that ‘socially created space,’ in the *in between*, the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener or reader . . . *ethos* is the admission of a standpoint, with the understanding that other standpoints exist and that they change over time. (Jarratt and Reynolds 53)

This view of *ethos* continues to account for ethics in the sense that a speaker must still take responsibility for assuming a position—albeit contingent—in the world, for the specific ways that the speaker sees the world, and selects locations to speak from (52). With this view, *ethos* becomes a force that constructs, constitutes, and reconstitutes the

rhetorical self through the choices made within each discursive or rhetorical performance, creating and recreating the speaker/writer in an ongoing process of self-fashioning.

Looking to Donna Haraway's reasoning in "Situated Knowledges" and her feminist reading of the subject "a split and contradictory self," Jarratt and Reynolds further argue that subjectivity is multidimensional; that the "knowing self is partial in all of its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (55). Thus, within rhetoric as *ethos*, these split selves are guises as constructed appearances, but they are not distortions or lies—they are recognitions of the ways one is positioned multiply and differently (55). This rhetorical construction allows speakers and writers to identify themselves authoritatively within networks of race, gender, class, and power. As they articulate differences between and within multiple viewpoints to fashion discourses that build upon specific points of commonality with audiences, they both "split and resuture" their speaking selves (57).

In order to rhetorically refashion the discourses and ideologies of absence present in Salt Lake City during the 1921 GFWC meeting, Bonnin needed to both "stand within" and simultaneously resist these constructions through a kind of multiplicity, through a kind of multifaceted construction as a speaking subject. Fluid forms of rhetorical production allowed Bonnin to engage in key forms of resistance and activism, even as she appeared comfortingly to her GFWC audience to be generally supporting hegemonic ideologies and oppressive cultural formations. A careful review of her reported utterances during the week-long GFWC meeting in Salt Lake City as strategic *ethos*—as assumed or created forms of "believable" appearances deployed, moment-to-moment—allows us to

read beyond assimilation and begin to more fully appreciate Bonnin's carefully crafted rhetorical efforts to engage in extended forms of indigenous activism. These considerations lead us to examine Bonnin's ability to appear *multiply*, to present different forms of essence as *ethos*. To accomplish this aim, we must begin by looking more carefully at the remaining textual record of Bonnin's speech acts in order to discern how Bonnin worked to create a "constantly splitting and resuturing self" as she addressed the GFWC clubwomen during their June, 1921 meeting.



#### Reading *Ethos* through a Textual Fragment

Beyond establishing Bonnin's capacity to engage in multiplicity as a rhetorical figure, we must also acknowledge the multiple speech acts she performed during the week she spent in Salt Lake City. Examining any remaining textual or archival evidence addressing these related, but separate performances allows us to assess Bonnin's use of *ethos* as a constantly shifting, moment-to-moment form of (ethical) self-fashioning within and across her multiple appearances before the GFWC in 1921.

To date, we have no clear record of any complete speech that Bonnin may have made during her week in Salt Lake City. Her personal papers do not contain any notes, drafts, or file copies specifically addressing the GFWC national meeting in 1921. Given that a significant portion of her personal papers were destroyed after her death, this documentary evidence may have existed at one time, but can no longer be recovered.<sup>41</sup> Subsequent reviews of the GFWC archives in Washington, D.C. did not uncover any other notes, letters, drafts or other documents that could be read to fill this gap. Nonetheless, the GFWC national newspaper, the *General Federation News* published some portions of a speech text attributed to Bonnin in their August 1921 issue, but this

print source does not clearly describe when Bonnin may have made these statements during the week of meetings held in Salt Lake City. We do not know if these statements were made on Monday during the initial Board of Director's meeting, on Wednesday evening during the formal events held in Assembly Hall, or on Friday evening during the meeting's concluding ceremonies also held in Assembly Hall. Also, it is difficult to tell whether these quoted references are actual transcriptions or translations and summaries submitted more or less accurately by clubwomen in attendance serving as reporters, writers, and editors for the *General Federation News*.

Organized by the Press and Publicity Department of the GFWC, the *General Federation News* (hereinafter "*News*") appeared as monthly newspaper for GFWC clubwomen. During this period, the GFWC arranged for the paper to be distributed nationally from a publication site in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Leslie ("Lessie") Stringfellow Reed, long-time national Chair of the Press and Publicity Department, served as editor for the *News* for many years and may have written many of the articles appearing within the paper. Given the nature of early twentieth-century technologies for newspaper print processing and distribution, the first *News* issue able to report on events occurring in Salt Lake City appeared in August of 1921. The first page of the August issue focuses on important developments at the June meeting and presents the beginning of two-page article entitled, "Indian Welfare Work Will Be Undertaken: Federated Women Want Citizenship Rights for American Indians; Committee Created." The first page of the article notes that the creation of the Indian Welfare Committee represented one of the "forward-looking pieces of business transacted" by GFWC during their June meeting, and notes:

The creation of the new committee follows closely upon a nation-wide campaign Americanization campaign waged by the Federation during which numerous appeals to ‘Americanize the First Americans’ have been made by Indians themselves.

With Woman Suffrage won, following a war of fifty years standing organized women of America will now work for the enfranchisement of ‘the first Americans,’ who are still denied rights of citizenship and who as a subject people are kept as wards of the state under superintendents of practically unlimited powers.<sup>42</sup>

The headline and these opening paragraphs can be read to confirm Bonnin’s ability throughout the week to work with Atwood, but also upstage Atwood, or “steal her thunder.” Overall results from the national meeting had served Atwood aim’s—Indian Welfare became a national concern for the GFWC—but Indian Welfare, as a concept becomes greatly enlarged, probably due to Bonnin’s week-long advocacy efforts. The GFWC audience now links Indian Welfare Committee work to much larger discourses related to Americanization and citizenship, discourses that did not necessarily serve Atwood’s aims.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps even more significantly, Bonnin has shifted the forms of rhetoric associated with Americanization and Citizenship—there is now a concern for treating the “First Americans” fairly or equitably which becomes visibly embedded within this larger discursive framework. Certainly this discursive location with a larger discourse of Americanization problematizes the creation of sovereign tribal space and conflates, if not completely erases, important aspects of indigeneity. Nonetheless, it does mean that whenever the GFWC members hear the phrase, “Americanize the First

Americans,” each club member will be more likely to learn of abuses in federal Indian policy related to the existing ward system, and begin to comprehend calls for enfranchisement—both important concerns for enhancing activism designed to improve conditions for existing indigenous communities during this period.

Adding a human element to these discursive developments, the second page of the *News* article mentions Bonnin by name and begins to report on some of her utterances:

The adoption of the resolution followed one of the dramatic and touching incidents of the convention. This was the expression of gratitude on the part of Zitkala-Sa, a full-blooded Sioux Indian of high culture who said in an emotional way:

‘The Great Spirit knows my heart is full! Words are so deep in my heart I cannot utter them without tears. As an educated woman I have tried as interpreter to make America, which is so generous to all other races of the world, understand the longing of her own people, the first Americans, to become citizens of this great republic. Children of the Great Spirit they are, the same as you, and as worthy as any other race of recognition.’<sup>44</sup>

Initially, we observe that the *News* writer, and certainly perhaps the GFWC audience, needed to frame Bonnin from the start and label or categorize her—as they did repeatedly by the end of the week—as that of a “full-blooded” Indian, but an exceptional one—of “high culture.” This later phrase affirms Bonnin’s fluency with Eurocentric ideals and values, her essential ability to “pass” in dominant culture, but simultaneously distances and sublimates the Dakota or “Sioux” culture she also embodies.

With this reported opening we also see a number of Bonnin's strategic rhetorical maneuvers right from the start, as she draws simultaneously from the discursive fields shaping Christianity, "Indianness," and Americanization. Bonnin's initial reference to the "Great Spirit" and her mention of a heart filled with gratitude gently positions her audience as Christian saviors and Bonnin as part of a community in need of help and rescue from other, more powerful entities. Her use of the term "Great Spirit" cleverly broadens and refigures "God" by simultaneously infusing or injecting a/the presence of more indigenous forms of spirituality and religiosity, but this shift would not have been too disruptive for her audience, particularly if they continued to perceive her as an "Indian" figure.

Building upon these anticipated "Indian" constructions, Bonnin repositions herself slightly, reminding her audience that she is "educated" and serves as a "translator." Both of these references establish her currency and authority, again, as a woman who moves between social spaces—a figure "able" to understand dominant culture and also speak effectively for "others." But rather than dwell in the (often nonproductive) discursive space of "Indianness," Bonnin pushes forward, linking her audience's "othering" immediately to the *topos* of Americanization—a potentially much more generative, less solidified space, ideologically and discursively, for challenging or refiguring dominant perceptions. Working efficiently, within the space of a few sentences, Bonnin reminds the GFWC women of their commitment to social activism as benevolence, their "generosity to other races," but then swiftly creates a distinction between the foreign-born and existing indigenous communities by noting that the clubwomen's "own people" are in need of assistance. This association becomes enhanced

by her subsequent use of the phrase, “the First Americans” which, by implication, neatly aligns (marginalized) indigenous communities more closely (than immigrants) to GFWC clubwomen but also keeps “the native” comfortably distant from these same women, as indigenous communities are perceived as “First”—but not quite contemporary or modern “Americans”—equating them still as part of a romanticized past. As discussed below, Bonnin frequently deploys the term, “First Americans,” perhaps as a kind of catch phrase for quickly referencing and indexing indigenous concerns as distinct from others, and their “right” as more or less “real” Americans to more attention, if not more concrete forms of help or aid.

Having established sufficient legibility and a unique rhetorical space for her message related to indigenous populations—i.e., we can be served by the GFWC interest in Americanization, but we have different needs—Bonnin speaks from a new rhetorical position as policy advocate and activist as she begins to address specific governmental policies, but she packages them in more palatable, less threatening phrases designed to motivate her audience to act in particular ways, and not alienate them:

At present they are but prisoners of the state, without citizenship rights, ruled by superintendents who are given almost unlimited powers over them. They are kept in ignorance instead of being trained to useful labor. Our dear friends here have asked you to establish an Indian Departemnt [sic] in your federation. O sisters, work to that end; work in cooperation that the stain upon our country in the treatment of my people may be wiped out. This is the happiest day of my life and you have just taken the



greatest step made in American civilization toward uplifting the  
aborigine.<sup>45</sup>

Here, we see Bonnin begin to address ward status, but casting this complex topic as first a problem of ignorance that can be remedied through education and hard work—two concepts near and dear to members of the GFWC. To bolster her authority to speak on these policy issues, Bonnin repositions herself as an ally of Atwood, linking her interests for the first time to Indian Welfare, and resuturing herself to members of the GFWC as a “sister,”—a cherished (non-Indian) family member speaking from a shared (geo-political) space known as “our country” —then switching slightly again to enlarge this vision, to reference “my people,” who by implication, have now become “our people.” Gently implying shameful treatment in the past, Bonnin also ingratiates—“this is the happiest day of my life,” you have taken “the greatest” step, you are “civilizing” and following your aims for Americanization, and then Bonnin makes yet another turn back to speak from her position as “Indian” figure by referencing the “aborigine.” A term that resonates with more respected forms of indigeneity today, during the early twentieth century this word, “aborigine,” may have primarily invoked notions of primitivism and “Indianness.” Thus, this last discursive turn arguably becomes a means for Bonnin to earn more trust and comfort from her audience as she begins to address more of her policy concerns in specific detail. As discussed more concretely below, invoking “Indianness” becomes a discursive means for simultaneously presenting aspects of her message most certain to threaten the status quo.

The *News* article next describes a bit more about Bonnin—how she attended the Boston Conservatory of Music, how her husband is serving as a Captain in the United

States Army—all information which continues to “authorize” her speech for this particular GFWC audience. Then the article presents eight additional paragraphs of speech text, reportedly presenting Bonnin’s utterances word for word. As we glimpse at the first sentences at the start of this extended section, we can see how Bonnin’s tone has shifted to a more pointed, policy-focused discussion, with concrete requests for political action:

You have enfranchised the black and are now waging a campaign of Americanization among the foreign born. Why discriminate against the noble aborigines of America—they who have no father-mother-land? <sup>46</sup>

Playing with her audience’s essential sense of fairness, Bonnin argues that “Indians” are at least as deserving as other enfranchised groups and then positions herself and the people she speaks for as “noble aborigines,” child-like, and in need of parenting. Already positioned by her audience as an “Indian of high culture,” with these latter references, Bonnin sutures herself more fully to discourses of “Indianness” (and perhaps discourses of the American West) circulating in Salt Lake City that week, creating the kind of legibility and credibility that her audience continued to expect. While this maneuver upholds prevailing racial hierarchies and dominant views of Native individuals as primitive, or less modern, it nonetheless conveys to her audience that she can be believed as she takes up a sustained critique of the status quo. Assuming yet another subject position that further embraces Christianity, Bonnin repeatedly reminds her audience of their messianic impulses, but links these impulses to a much larger, more radical agenda:

The gospel of humanitarianism, like charity, must begin at home.

Americanize the first Americans! Give them freedom to hold open forums

for the expression of their thought, to do their own thinking, to exercise their own judgement [sic] , to manage their own business, and finally, to become citizens of this republic whose constitution entitles each individual to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

We, the American Indians, insist upon recognition of the fact that we are really normal and quite worth-while human beings.<sup>47</sup>

Repeating her established catch phrase for indigenous communities as “First Americans,” Bonnin gets here to the very heart of her message. Bonnin radically refigures “Indian”—she humanizes and concretizes indigenous existence. Arguing that humanitarianism, even as charity, *must* embrace certain principles, Bonnin demands enhanced opportunities for voice, agency, sovereignty, and self-determination, linking these demands to the most over-used American catch phrase of all: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Finally, she insists on presence—we are here, we are normal, we are worthwhile.

Establishing this crucial shift, Bonnin aligns herself, her constructed self with those indigenous communities now present, now able to speak more meaningfully. Remaining sections of Bonnin’s speech text make very specific demands and outline very specific means for achieving political reform:

We want American citizenship for every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States.

We want a democracy wheel whose hub shall be an organization of progressive educated Indian citizens and whose rim shall be the Constitution of your American Government . . . .

I would suggest business schools for the Indians, together with a voice in their own affairs . . . .

I would suggest that Congress enact more stringent laws to restrain [Bureau of Indian Affairs employees] and further, that the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which through 90 years has steadily enlarged itself, regardless of the diminishing Indian population, be relieved of its practically unlimited autocratic supervision of an orderly people now kept prisoners on small remnants of land not shown on our maps in a prolonged warship [sic], never intended to be permanent, but assumed by the Government as an emergency measure and not compatible [sic] with the idea of American freedom and American ideals, and contrary to the very constitution itself of the ‘land of the free.’<sup>48</sup>

Moving carefully through a series of related but very different rhetorical positions, Bonnin now stands within discourses of the Indian and Americanization, but has completely reworked them. Her call for action embraces much more than supporting the creation of an Indian Welfare Department. More importantly, Americanization as embraced and envisioned by the GFWC has now been substantially enlarged to include creating more sovereign space, providing opportunities for voice and self-autonomy in determining social policy, a dismantled ward system, and enfranchisement. Indeed, to do any less would be “un-American.”

An experienced political advocate by this point in her career and perhaps drawing upon her previous experience as an editor and speaker for the SAI, Bonnin knew that these isolated speech acts were not likely to produce sustainable social change. Even

though the GFWC during this period contained more than two million members nationwide and most club members in attendance would take detailed reports back to their local members, Bonnin needed to ensure that these crucial messages would be repeated and transmitted as widely and as easily as possible. Archival records confirm that Bonnin created written texts with the capacity to reinforce the messages she presented orally in Salt Lake City, working to generate additional press coverage that might lead to enhanced awareness and the possibility of additional speaking engagements where she could secure additional income through speaker's fees and the sale of her literary books, and also offer informational pamphlets and political tracts that she prepared to address these activist aims.

For example, a curious article appears within *The Atlanta Constitution* (hereinafter "*Constitution*") published on July 24, 1921 under the heading: "A Plea is Made to Americanize First Americans." Buried on page B26 of the *Constitution*, the article purports to discuss a highlight from the recent GFWC national meeting, and states, "One of the sensations of the general federation conference was the paper read by Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), of Washington, D.C., 'Americanize the First American.' Her paper as follows: . . . ." The article then provides eight more paragraphs from a paper Bonnin reportedly presented during the GFWC meeting.<sup>49</sup> As discussed below, this speech text does not align neatly with the speech fragments appearing within the *General Federation News*. The article appearing in the *Constitution* does not mention a day or a specific time during the week that Bonnin may have presented her paper, speaking from this document as a speech text. If the *Constitution* had sent reporters to Salt Lake City in early June, it would seem unusual for the paper to report on these events more than five

weeks later. It seems more likely that most of the article—as a kind of “ready-made” text the paper could select to run—had been sent to the Atlanta newspaper by Bonnin shortly after her time in Utah. Its appearance in later sections of the paper, specifically on page B6 perhaps as a kind of space-filler, seems to confirm this view.

However, the text appearing in the *Constitution* article does match an essay found within the “Americanize the First American: A Plan of Regeneration” an extensive eight-page document prepared by Bonnin sometime during this period which features a cover photo of Bonnin surrounded by American flags [See Figure 8].

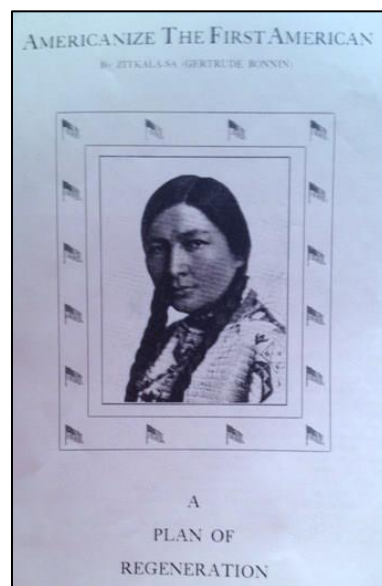


Fig. 9. Pamphlet Cover, “Americanize the First American: A Plan of Regeneration”

This eight-page document contains two essays and an extensive chart that diagrams Bonnin’s “democracy wheel.” All of these textual components are designed to outline and explain Bonnin’s specific plans for “Americanizing the First American.” When Bonnin prepared these documents, how Bonnin used these documents, and where

she sought to distribute them is not fully known at this time. The first essay in this document, appearing under the title “Americanize the First American,” notes at its conclusion—“Written for The Pen Woman Magazine” (4). It is likely that Bonnin prepared a series of documents in support of her advocacy campaign and drew from these documents interchangeably to speak, and to generate greater interest as press releases or informational handouts. During this period, Bonnin customarily sent prepared text—as pamphlets, essays of interest, and “press releases”—to print mediums, particularly newspapers, located throughout the country in an effort to generate greater interest and publicity for her activities and her causes.<sup>50</sup>

This project works specifically with the speech text as reported within the *General Federation News* as the most reliable evidence of articulations made by Bonnin and subsequently interpreted by her primary audience, the women of the GFWC in 1921. Nonetheless, there is a need for more scholarly work which aims to examine more fully Bonnin’s rhetorical production (oral and written) across all of these networks of distribution, particularly between 1920 and 1925. Another article written by Bonnin, for example, appeared in December, 1921 in *Edict Magazine*, the newsletter for the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs. This article does not claim to present or reprint speeches given by Bonnin in Salt Lake City, but it does mirror the article that appeared in *The Atlanta Constitution* in July of 1921.

All of these remaining textual artifacts confirm that Bonnin’s strategic use of *ethos* as multiple essences allowed her to establish the kind of believability or authority that could be easily “read” across existing networks of engagement and activism found within women’s clubs of this era. Without this kind of strategic maneuvering, her words

may have failed or invariably offended. Her careful maneuvering through speech acts and through subsequent written texts adopting a similar kind of *ethos* allowed Bonnin to legibly and authoritatively create and then reinforce an engaging, widespread message—the story of the “First Americans”—that worked to enlarge the discourse of Americanization in meaningful ways. Members of the GWFC are often credited with providing critical support for passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, and this network of activism provided vocal and effective public support for extensive federal reforms enacted in 1934 as the Indian New Deal.<sup>51</sup> Bonnin’s rhetorical production in 1921 sparked networks of native presence within discursive fields of absence. Her call to “Americanize the First Americans” as a story of manufactured subjectivity and actual need allowed politically engaged groups of largely white, middle-class women located throughout the country to both perpetuate absence and invoke native presence through powerful forms of collaborative feminist rhetoric.



#### Collaborative Feminist Rhetoric

Writing in 2003, feminist rhetorical scholar Lindal Buchanan identified a new heuristic for assessing rhetorical production by silenced or marginalized groups working to deliver provocative discursive messages in otherwise hostile and resistant environments. Traditional analysis located outside of feminist inquiry often fails to assess adequately those forms of rhetoric which exist beyond single speech acts issued by solitary rhetors within very specific, localized contexts. Attempting to fill this gap, Buchanan developed the notion of collaborative rhetoric. She defines collaboration for these purposes as “a cooperative endeavor involving two or more people that results in a rhetorical product, performance, or event” (43). Buchanan notes that while “credit for the



final result may go either to a solitary individual or a collective, the product itself is constructed and completed through the direct and indirect contribution of others” (43).

To assess these “direct and indirect” contributions, Buchanan proposes a “collaborative continuum” designed to account more carefully for often overlooked contributions and further assess the richness and power of this rhetorical method which relies on multiple rhetors working at different times, often from multiple locations. *Productive* and *supportive* collaborations make up each end of this continuum, with each term “possessing its own distinctive purposes, rhetorical contributions, and forms of assistance” (44). *Productive* collaborations involve two or more people working together to produce a rhetorical product (i.e., speech, pamphlet, letter, or public event), while *supportive* collaborations contribute indirectly to (an)other’s rhetorical production and delivery (i.e., providing child care or family assistance so that others might engage in activism, or assisting with the neighborhood delivery of pamphlets). Similar to strategic essences for *ethos*, collaborative rhetoric works through fluid rhetorical constructions with great capacity to shift—as Buchanan notes, these concepts are “remarkably flexible, capable of assuming an infinite number of forms in response to exigence, purpose, process, and context. Overall, they provide the most inventive options for creating and delivering discourse in resistant surroundings” (44-45).

As Bonnin encountered a resistant environment in June of 1921—in Salt Lake City and within the country more generally—it would appear that a *productive* collaboration with Stella Atwood initially enabled Bonnin to appear before key members of the GFWC. However they came to be linked together, Atwood served as a *productive* collaborator, a person who helped Bonnin generate rhetorical acts (44). Without Atwood,

it may not have been possible for Bonnin to appear before the GFWC at this very visible national level. Moving along our continuum, it would seem that the GFWC clubwomen in the audience throughout the week became *supportive* collaborators. These women did not produce a rhetorical event at the national meeting, but they went on to create new rhetorical events in support of the initial event created by Bonnin and Atwood. Most clubs held informative de-briefing meetings and created their own local publications summarizing events at the national meeting. Ultimately their local audiences also assume *supportive* collaborative roles at the other end of our continuum, contributing indirectly to Bonnin's rhetorical production and delivery by disseminating, her message—in whole or in part—telling and retelling her story in a myriad of ways, moments, and places.

Perhaps even more significant as an aspect of *productive supportive* collaboration found within the middle of our continuum, these local clubs, in the months following Bonnin's appearance in Salt Lake City, begged Bonnin herself to come and speak, shifting the role of these local club women from supportive collaboration to a much more productive form of collaboration that continued to reemphasize, redistribute—indeed, retell Bonnin's message as story in significant ways. Writing to Bonnin on June 24, 1921 from Davenport, Iowa, for example, Mrs. F.S. Treat, Program Committee Chair for the Davenport Women's Club states:

Dear Miss Bonnin:

One of our Davenport Women's Club members, . . . just mailed from Salt Lake City a folder describing your work and I am anxious to see if we can't get you to come to us some time this coming year to appear on the program at one of our general meetings.<sup>52</sup>

An article appearing in the December, 1921 issue of *Edict Magazine*, a news source for the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs also notes that Bonnin will be appearing "before several of our clubs in January, and may still be secured for a few open dates"

(6). An inset for this article prepared by Mrs. Marc Fowler of the Illinois Federation states:

Indian Welfare was uppermost throughout the convention, from the opening addresses of welcome to the session to the closing evening session with its program of Indian music and addresses on 'The Indian of Today.' The presence of Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin, a Sioux Indian of high culture and rare personal charm, who is devoting her life to the interests of her people, was an added inspiration.

Mrs. Bonnin is an eloquent speaker and her plea is 'Americanize the first Americans, giving them those advantages that we offer to all who come from foreign shores, legislation, better education, a voice in their own affairs, and eventually, citizenship.' (6)

As Lindal Buchanan notes, although it is the least studied or least recognized kind of rhetoric, collaboration is key to understanding women's unique rhetorical challenges and compensations because this concept recognizes the kind of "ghosting" that enables effective, but often overlooked, means for advancing rhetorical production and delivery (44-45). The collaborative continuum is a useful model capable of recognizing the varied cooperative practices—direct and indirect, productive and supportive—undergirding women's rhetoric (57).<sup>53</sup>

Nonetheless, as the *Edict* article affirms, these collaborations do come at a price. Certainly, as Buchanan acknowledges, a dilemma is encoded within the polysemy of the term, collaboration, which is forever caught between the “dual valences” of working together on a common cause and colluding with an enemy (47). In Bonnin’s case, this encoding may have reinforced hegemonic perceptions of “Indianness,” and forms of Americanization that invoked totalizing forms of assimilation which worked to deny indigeneity, but the process may have been the only viable rhetorical option available to Bonnin if she wished to reach large, civically-minded audiences. The process also worked to ensure the survival of her perspectives, her performances, her written texts.

Thus, despite the inherent discursive risks collaborative rhetoric may entail, the traction, exposure, and visibility it can provide for certain rhetors cannot be denied. After her appearance in Utah in 1921, Bonnin went on to accomplish some of her most effective advocacy work through the GFWC, utilizing the organization as an outlet for her extensive writing, as essays and pamphlets, on “Indian” reform (Johnson and Wilson 33). At least one scholar asserts that Bonnin served as Chair of the Indian Welfare Committee (Wilkinson 190), but this does not appear to be the case. However, Stella Atwood, serving as Chair, did hire Bonnin to work as a researcher for the Indian Welfare Committee shortly after the June, 1921 meeting. Through this work, Bonnin met Mathew K. Sniffen and Charles H. Faben and their collaboration led to a comprehensive investigation of land fraud in Oklahoma, resulting in the nationally acclaimed report, *Oklahoma’s Poor Rich Indians*, issued in 1924.<sup>54</sup>

As discussed in Chapter One, William Willard’s 1985 essay, “Zitkala-Ša: A Woman Who Would Be Heard” asserts that Bonnin’s “greatest impact” on federal Indian

policy came about as a result of her appearance at a meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in Atlantic City, New Jersey in May 1922. In this same article, Willard references Bonnin's appearance with Atwood at a national GFWC meeting which he confusingly states occurred in July, 1922, and then later in the same article references as occurring in July of 1921 (13). A careful review of archival records held in the Women's History Resource Center at the GFWC National Headquarters indicates that Willard's emphasis on a meeting in Atlantic City during May of 1922 is misplaced and some of his dates are incorrect. The GFWC did not hold a national meeting in Atlantic City during 1921 or 1922, and their only national meeting in Salt Lake City during this period occurred in 1921. Moreover, Willard provides no attribution for his assertions. From the thorough review found within this Chapter, we can now argue more persuasively that Bonnin's most visible work within and through the GFWC began on a national level during the Salt Lake City meeting held in July, 1921.

As discussed above, immediately following this national meeting in Salt Lake City, Bonnin became a popular speaker at many local and regional GFWC meetings. Bonnin also spoke at national conventions held by the GFWC in 1922 and 1924. Convention transcripts and newspaper reports addressing these appearances indicate that Stella Atwood orchestrated each of these events and they did not generate any new forms of attention for Bonnin or her (enlarged) message of Americanization.<sup>55</sup> It may be that Bonnin helped to engage and shape GFWC interest in 1921, but lost control of a larger Indian Welfare agenda within the GFWC over time. Nonetheless, due in large part to the initial interest sparked by Bonnin in 1921, the GFWC continued to agitate for federal Indian Reform for the next thirteen years. While levels of commitment, engagement, and

support varied from club to club throughout this extended period, the GFWC continues to receive credit for generally advancing advocacy efforts at the federal level, most particularly for supporting the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, and subsequently calling for more effective federal reforms through the issuance of the Meriam Report in 1928 and the implementation of the Indian New Deal in 1934.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond this successful work within the GFWC, Bonnin's Salt Lake City appearances in 1921 helped to launch her reputation as a national policy advocate for federal Indian reform and this reputation continued to provide key discursive platforms to her for many years to come. Her work within the GFWC reached millions of women throughout the country and provided greater forms of visibility for her concerns, nationally, regionally, and locally—through speeches and through the dissemination of written texts. Like a multi-faceted star quilt forged from many scraps of fabric by many different hands, Bonnin's speech acts in 1921 invoked multiple forms of collaborative effort, and ultimately led to the successful crafting of limited but sustainable and moderately successful forms of indigenous activism.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. I have chosen to use a symbol representing a Dakota star quilt throughout this third chapter in order to draw further attention to key concepts emphasized here, including native presence, community, and collaboration.

2. See generally, Prucha, Hertzberg, Philp.

3. Huebner 347-348 citing in part to Atwood, “The Case” at 10.

4. GFWC’s roots can be traced back to 1868 when Jane Cunningham Croly, a professional journalist, attempted to attend a dinner at an all-male press club honoring British novelist Charles Dickens. Denied admittance, Croly formed a woman’s club—Sorosio. In 1889, Jane Croly invited women's clubs throughout the United States to pursue the cause of federation by attending a convention in New York City. On April 24, 1890, 63 clubs officially formed the General Federation of Women's Club by ratifying the GFWC constitution. See generally, Houde and Wells.

5. See Huebner at 343. This profile for GFWC women complicates and differs slightly from scholarship by Jacobs who asserts that women interested in securing reform for Pueblo communities located within New Mexico between 1880 and 1930 were either “female moral reformers” who emphasized assimilation, or “antimodern feminists” like Mabel Dodge Luhan, who reified Pueblo culture and organized to protect Native culture. In her recent review of the GFWC during this period, Kristen White argues that while GFWC leadership included primarily white, middle-class women, “difference as well as similarity marked groups clustered around the umbrella term, ‘we,’ which created a ‘diverse and complex movement’ that included a limited number of clubs comprised of

African American and Native American women as well (146-147). Archival reviews of GFWC records confirm the existence of several “Native American” clubs, but their involvement with Indian Welfare as promoted by the GFWC has not been determined at this time. See, Vertical File, “Native American Women’s Clubs,” Women’s History Resource Center. Also, within her scholarly work on Elizabeth Bender Cloud, Lisa Tetzloff argues that the GFWC treated Native Americans during this period as a “disadvantaged” population who they perceived to be in need of wisdom and guidance, but largely ignored throughout the history of the club movement (77-115).

6. See, “What the Papers Say about Indians” which references an appearance by Bonnin in Riverside, California in 1917 (63). An unpublished paper written by Susan Rose Dominguez found in the Women’s History Resource Center GFWC Vertical File for “Gertrude Bonnin” also claims that Bonnin spoke at Glenwood Mission Inn in Riverside, California on March 30, 1917.

7. Vertical File for “Gertrude Bonnin,” Women’s History Resource Center.

8. File copy of letter dated May 23, 1921.

9. See Hafen who argues, in part, that Bonnin’s expository writing during this period is full of high emotion and rhetoric incorporating traditional/tribal experience with the idiom and sentiment of the age ( “Sentimentality and Sovereignty” 39). More generally, Hafen asserts that Bonnin’s work across multiple genres (literary texts, operatic production, and expository writing, particularly for speeches) adapts and modifies popular Euro-American forms, styles, and dominant ideologies in order to express Native ideals and generate more widespread support for Native concerns.



10. See generally, Clarke's chapter on "Permanent Organizations" working for the war effort.

11. "General Summary of Program Heard" at 12.

12. "Suggested Program for Americanization" at 2, 4.

13. See generally, Barrett, Olneck, and Van Nuys.

14. See e.g., Prucha, *Americanizing*.

15. See, (Kristen) White who argues that the GFWC campaign for Americanization fostered racist notions, but also provided rhetorical openings for new voices—particularly immigrants, newly naturalized citizens, and young adults.

16. "Forces Prepare for Convention" at 13.

17. "Problems for Women of Western States Reviewed" at 13.

18. See generally, Huebner at 360-364 and GFWC Archives, Convention Transcripts, 1924 and 1926.

19. "Work of Clubs in Many States is Reviewed" at 11.

20. "The Red Man, while he does not seek separate government, asks that now he be recognized on equal footing with all Americans in our democratic land." Letter to Montezuma dated December 6, 1919.

21. See generally, "Editorial Comments" and "America's Indian Problem."

22. Program, Great Salt Lake Council, Wednesday, June 15, 1921.

23. Program, Great Salt Lake Council, Friday, June 17, 1921.

24. "Indian Welfare Work Will be Undertaken" at 1.

25. "1902 to 1932 Activities" at 5.

26. “General Summary of Program Heard” at 2; “Art in Its Relation to Daily Life” at 4. See also Reiser for discussions of early twentieth-century pageantry as public performances invoking popular tropes of anti-modernism and primitivism.

27. “General Summary” at 2.

28. “General Summary” at 2. In this same session, the clubwomen learned that “medical men and scientists find ‘jazz’ dancing has bad effects” (2).

29. “General Summary” at 11.

30. “General Summary of Program Heard” at 2.

31. “Program Heard” at 2. Founded in 1915, the Taos Society of Artists had been formed by Bert Geer Phillips, Ernest L. Blumenschein, Joseph Henry Sharp, Oscar E. Berninghaus, E. Irving Couse, and W. Herbert Dunton, and came to include artists such as Mabel Dodge Lujan and Kenneth Adams. See generally, (Robert) White.

32. “Art in Its Relation to Daily Life” at 4.

33. “General Summary” at 11.

34. “Remarkable Musical Programs at Council Meeting” at 8.

35. A form of “Indian play” can also be observed in the earlier discussion of Indian Art, as GFWC women believe the white, upper- and middle-class men associated with the Taos Society of Artists can “feel, see, know, dream, and breathe, and live the life of the Indian they portray.”

36. Green at 704; see also, Castañeda at 75-77, 87-88 who calls for feminist scholars to write from new points of views, attending to these racialized complexities in more specific ways, exploring both the hegemonic and counterhegemonic strategies, roles, and activities that women developed and employed in response to colonialism in

order to reclaim women as active subjects, not passive objects or victims. And see, Sorisio, who argues that viewing Sarah Winnemucca (one of Bonnin's contemporaries) as an "Indian princess" has limited our ability to understand the complexity of her self-representation and obscured other more resistant, more activist facets of her early twentieth-century articulations or performances within dominant culture.

37. See also, Carpenter, "Detecting Indianness."

38. Coolidge's concerns regarding trivialization are significant and should not be understated. As Michelle Wick Patterson so eloquently notes, "SAI members walked a thin line in their negotiations of Indian cultural imagery. By catering to white interests and expectations of 'the Indian,' they risked becoming the 'stage Indians' . . . . Many of their performances . . . reflected Indian life as whites imagined it—rooted in the past and rapidly disappearing . . . . While it advanced a platform arguing that Native Americans deserved full rights as the nation's first citizens, SAI performances suggested that 'real' Indians only lived on reservations, dressed in Indian costumes, sang 'authentic' songs, made pottery and rugs, and performed colorful dances. This image of the 'real' Indian did not truly represent the SAI'S image of the acculturated modern Indian, and it obscured and confused the messages concerning modern Indians" (55-56).

39. "Indian Group." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.

40. See Crowley 83-86. These theoretical shifts, occurring over centuries of practice, cannot be treated in more than cursory fashion for the purposes of this project, but certainly invoke more complex considerations which will not be addressed here. For more background, see generally, Jasinski, Baumlin and Baumlin.

41. See Chapter Two and its discussion of the destruction of Bonnin's personal papers in 1951 by employees of the Wilkinson law firm.

42. "Indian Welfare" at 1.

43. See generally, Huebner, who documents Atwood's interest in federal policy related to water, mineral, and land rights in New Mexico, which continued to be Atwood's primary focus for the next six years.

44. "Indian Welfare" at 9.

45. "Indian Welfare" at 9.

46. "Indian Welfare" at 9.

47. "Indian Welfare" at 9.

48. "Indian Welfare" at 9. Bonnin's personal papers contain an eight-page pamphlet with two essays and an extensive diagram of her "democracy wheel," all designed to outline and explain her specific plans for "Americanizing the First American: A Plan of Regeneration." No GFWC records reviewed to date reference these documents by name or specifically mention their use/distribution by Bonnin during the June, 1921 GFWC meeting in Salt Lake City, but as discussed in later sections of this Chapter, correspondence found in Bonnin's personal papers from local GFWC clubwomen indicates that Bonnin may have distributed some form of pamphlet or tract during her time in Salt Lake City in support of her Americanization campaign.

49. A copy of this article from *The Atlanta Constitution* appears in the Appendix.

50. See also, discussion found within Chapter Two addressing an article about Bonnin published in Legrand, Iowa in 1922.

51. See generally, Huebner, Philp, Prucha, and Hertzberg.

52. Letter from Mrs. F.S. Treat, page 1.

53. See also Fredlund and (Kristen Kate) White.

54. See Philp, Prucha, and Wilkinson.

55. See, *General Federation News* issues for 1922, GFWC Convention Transcripts from 1922, 1924, and "Indian Welfare Committee Board of Directors Minutes" Vertical Files 1-4 at the Women's History Resource Center.

56. For an extended discussion of these efforts, see generally, Downes, Hertzberg, Holm, Huebner, Prucha, and Tyler. Published on February 21, 1928, the Meriam Report presented the results of a year-long, government-sponsored investigation by an influential committee of reformers headed by Lewis Meriam. The Report clearly documented extensive acts of fraud and misappropriation within the federal Indian Bureau, wide-spread abuse of Native children within the national boarding school system, and further confirmed that many provisions of the Dawes Act had been used illegally for decades to deprive many indigenous communities of essential land and resources. The Report provided much of the data used to argue for the sweeping reforms of 1934 and strongly influenced later twentieth-century governmental policies regarding land allotment, education, and health care. The GFWC supported calls for the initial Meriam investigation in 1926 and worked continually to call attention to the Report after its issuance in 1928. See e.g., GFWC Department of Public Welfare Publications, "A Bulletin on the Meriam Report" (1928) and "Report of the Indian Welfare Division and Outline of Work" (1930-1932).

### A CONCLUSION, OF SORTS

Here is one way to finish this story before we speak of many more stories: This review closely examined two particular rhetorical events—one from 1921 and one from 1922—but many more opportunities for scholarship on Bonnin’s rhetorical legacy as an orator and indigenous advocate remain. Beyond the need to more closely examine Bonnin’s early college orations in 1896 and the rhetorical shifts she implemented between her two “Side-by-Side” speeches, there is a need to examine Bonnin’s work at the regional and local level with women’s clubs throughout the country, as well as her complicated advocacy relationships with Stella Atwood, John Collier, and several other reform organizations of the period.

Indeed, this entire decade—the 1920s—encompasses a very active period for Bonnin which we have just begun to explore. As mentioned in Chapter One, the advocacy work undertaken by both Bonnin and her husband to seek relief in judicial forums, her frequent testimonies before legislative branches of government during the 1920s and the 1930s, and her later efforts as a community organizer continue to be under studied.

Bonnin’s relationship with several prominent reform organizations of the period, including the Indian Rights Association and the American Indian Defense Association also remains as a key area of study. Unlike the speech events occurring in 1921 and 1922, Bonnin’s personal papers contain notes and speech drafts for later appearances Bonnin made before several of these organizations in 1928 and 1929, which provides a rich opportunity for further scholarship. Specifically, Bonnin spoke to the Indian Rights Association on December 15, 1928 in Atlantic City, New Jersey to address “the Problem

of Indian Administration,” and then appeared several months later, on October 17, 1929, before the Lake Mohonk Conference in Mohonk Lake, New York to speak on “The Indian Side of the Question.” On both occasions, Bonnin argued that the Meriam Report did not go far enough to reform or dismantle a corrupt federal system.

Arguably, on both rhetorical occasions, Bonnin “spoke truth to power,” engaging in *parrhesia*, a concept first utilized by Ancient Greek rhetors and re-theorized by Michel Foucault in 2001. As Foucault notes, the individual who uses *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes*, is someone who takes a risk and speaks candidly, opening one’s heart and mind completely to other people through discourse. In these two instances, Bonnin’s frankness helped to infuse a national debate with native presence and create a greater opportunities for decolonialized forms of discursive, if not geo-political, space. Her candid “re-storying” in Atlantic City and Mohonk Lake was covered by national media, followed by politically-engaged members of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and their Indian Welfare Committee, and led, in part, to a widely read exposé in *Good Housekeeping* written by Vera Connolly that inspired a significant number of relatively “new” female voters to push actively for more substantial national reform. Using *parrhesia* as an analytical frame, future scholarship on Bonnin could examine under what conditions an otherwise marginalized voice may communicate frankly, and with what effects and consequences, as a tool for creating conditions of possibility for both survivance and sovereignty.

John Collier’s papers as recorded on microfiche have been reviewed at the Newberry Library, but more archival work should be undertaken to complete this specific scholarly work involving the latter half of the 1920s thoroughly and in an ethically

appropriate manner. Future efforts should include a review of the Indian Rights Association archive held at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and recovering annual proceedings of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian, which continue to be scattered throughout archival sites around the country. Papers for the American Indian Defense Association (“AIDA”) must also be gleaned from disparate sources, and most particularly from archives holding the papers of individual AIDA members, including the John Collier collection at Yale, and the Samuel A. Elliot Collection at Cornell.

Once assembled, all of this work must also be reviewed with Native scholars and members of the Yankton or Ihaŋktunwaŋ Dakota community in order to solicit appropriate review and identify appropriate means for “giving back” or sharing this information in useful ways with tribal members. As noted earlier, these considerations will continue to be addressed with members of my doctoral committee and incorporated as quickly as possible, but most certainly prior to any form of dissemination as publication.

In its current state, this project sought to recover and begin to examine Bonnin’s early twentieth-century efforts to advance indigenous concerns, particularly through her use of oration and oratory performance in 1921 and 1922. Beyond drawing attention to the significance and importance of Bonnin’s often overlooked history as public speaker, this scholarship worked to expand our understanding of existing concepts found within the Western Eurocentric rhetorical canon. The critical review of Bonnin’s performance before the Washington Monument in June of 1922 found in Chapter Two provides scholars of rhetoric and composition with an enlarged understanding of *epideixis* and its capacity for incorporating expressions of social critique through public performance and



display. The thorough examination of Bonnin's appearances before the GFWC in June of 1921 found in Chapter Three also provides scholars of rhetoric and composition with an enhanced understanding of *ethos* and its fluid capacity for allowing rhetors to speak ethically and effectively from multiple socio-cultural positions.

As interdisciplinary scholarship, this project also takes up considerations of alternate forms of rhetoric as tradition and practice beyond Western Eurocentric constructs through its considerations of Dakota story and storytelling as invoked and deployed by Bonnin. The interdisciplinary considerations found throughout Chapters One, Two, and Three all work to enhance our understanding of rhetorical efficacy and agency within the field of rhetoric and composition, and within Native American Studies as it forges closer and closer ties with more globally-focused forms of indigenous and decolonial scholarship. Overall, the scholarly work found within this manuscript worked to enhance our understanding of Bonnin as a rhetorical figure, and further establish how her rhetorical legacy embodies story, traces of discourse, and the tease of presence in significant and instructive ways.

In my view, the close, detailed examination of Bonnin's rhetorical production conducted here further reveals the need for two additional, expanded areas of scholarly inquiry related to Bonnin and her rhetorical legacy: (1) the relationship between orality and literacy, and (2) means for thinking more productively about rhetorical agency. Let me address each of these areas of inquiry in sequence.

This project began with the understanding that Bonnin worked throughout her adult life to form extensive social and political networks, that she worked through the speaker's platform, through all available forms of written production, and through all

available technologies of the time period to reach the largest possible range of audiences and engage their support for indigenous concerns. She appeared as a speaker, performed as a storyteller, agreed to participate in tableaux; she wrote letters, gave congressional testimony, worked as an investigator and community organizer, served as an editor, wrote political tracts, and sent press releases to national, regional, and local newspaper outlets. While this project began with a general understanding of Bonnin's continuous, life-long efforts as an advocate to both speak or perform within public spaces *and* produce alphabetic text for public review, this project revealed more layers of linkage, design, and intent between her oral performances and the specific written texts she produced—a phenomenon that has not been addressed fully in existing scholarship related to Bonnin. There is a need to continue to explore Bonnin's ability to play with orality and literacy as an effective rhetorical maneuver and as an intentional strategy for enhancing means for self-determination, sovereignty, and survivance.

Certainly one example of Bonnin's ability to work through orality and literacy as a complex rhetorical strategy can be found in the discussion accompanying Chapter Two which examines the reading of Bonnin's "Dacotah Ode" into the *Congressional Record* in 1922. While this specific outcome may have been beyond Bonnin's personal control, it is not too much of a stretch to assume that Bonnin knew this government-sanctioned proceeding would be recorded and memorialized through alphabetic text in some significant and official manner. Evidence of her ability to work through orality and literacy in order to enhance interest and engagement for indigenous concerns within dominant culture can also be found when we review the discussion found within Chapter Three addressing Bonnin's GFWC appearances in Salt Lake City in June of 1921. While

the archival record for the speech performances associated with this event exists in fragments, letters from GFWC clubwomen found within Bonnin's personal papers reference her use of tracts or pamphlets to expand and enhance her speech efforts that week. The newspaper article published in *The Atlanta Constitution* more than a month after the actual GFWC meeting indicates that Bonnin, or someone working on her behalf, engaged in a form of (self) promotion designed specifically to extend Bonnin's message(s) from that week through print. This appears even more likely when we acknowledge that the text printed in *The Atlanta Constitution* mirrors a text published previously in a Pen Women's magazine article; can be found again, word-for-word, within an essay entitled "Americanize the First American" within the "Plan for Regeneration" pamphlet presumably drafted and distributed by Bonnin that week in June of 1921; and appears again, word-for-word several months later in the Illinois GFWC *Edict Magazine* within an article entitled, "America's Indian Problem." The same message is continually repackaged and redeployed through various print mediums located around the country. This print message relates closely to, and continues to build upon the speech fragments we observe in written accounts of Bonnin's speech acts recorded contemporaneously by *General Federation News* editors and reporters.

Moreover, a review of Bonnin's remaining papers, now held in Archives and Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, indicates to the general observer that Bonnin may have been almost hyperaware of the importance of creating a written record. She subscribed to a number of clipping services, she appears to have saved notes, journals, drawings, related scraps of paper, print copies of publications, pamphlets, drafts, and letters, almost compulsively, and she

made extensive file copies—all of this can be observed by reviewing her remaining archives which consist of 15 boxes—and the bulk of her archive may have actually been destroyed in 1951! At a minimum, more scholarly work must be done to assess and review the relationship between Bonnin's oral performances and the specific ways that Bonnin may have intended to embed orality and story within more culturally privileged forms of alphabetic text circulating within dominant society at that time.

Many of us are familiar with Walter Ong's highly influential work from 1982, *Orality and Literacy*, which perceives a divide between orality and literacy, and assigns greater significance to alphabetic forms of communication. For Ong, the technology of writing creates new memory patterns and new forms of cognitive processing vastly superior, in his view, to more "primitive" forms of oral tradition and practice. Despite initial, widespread acceptance of Ong's work, many scholars across multiple disciplines (including rhetoric and composition, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and indigenous studies) continue to question Ong's assertions, rejecting his artificial splitting of the actual circuits of communication associated with human experience and further challenging his simplistic, ethnocentric claims.

Later work by James Gee, and many others, confirms that both orality and literacy are not universal, continually distinct, unchanging constructs. Rather, orality and literacy tend to be shaped contextually and historically by a wide range of physical, cultural, social, sexual, and linguistic signifiers. This key shift in our understanding of human communication resituates orality and literacy within social spaces which evidence that these two forms of communicative practice exist in a dialogic relationship—these two forms of expression are continually and intimately linked. As Gee explains:

the speech-writing or orality-literacy distinction begins to become problematic: what seem to be involved are different cultural practices that in certain contexts call for certain uses of language, language patterned in certain ways and trading on features like integration/fragmentation and detachment/involvements to various degrees. (56)

Indeed, contemporary scholars generally believe that orality functions within and through literacy and literacy functions within and through orality as an ever-changing form of dynamic interplay. We can no longer think in binary terms that continue to separate orality from literacy—as orality *and/or* literacy.

This theoretical shift has profound implications for scholars who seek to examine indigenous forms of activism in more generative and more productive ways. As linguists Joel Sherzer and Anthony Woodbury note in their 1987 text, *Native American Discourse: Poetics and Rhetoric*:

Serious attention to the nature of oral performance in relation to social and cultural context and in relationship to the transcription, representation, translation, and analysis reveals that there is no simple dichotomy between oral and written discourse, between nonliterate and literate societies.

Rather there is considerable and quite interesting continuity between the oral and the written, showing diversity within each: There are oral genres in Native America that have such ‘written properties’ as fixed text, ‘planning,’ and abstraction from context, and written genres in European based societies having such ‘oral’ properties as spontaneity and ‘repair,’ scansion into pause phrases, and context-dependent interpretability. (10)

Essentially, as artificial distinctions between oral and written production blur and continue to fall away, we can begin to think in a more complex fashion about the way that these two processes shape and inform a larger loop of communicative practices, particularly for a rhetorical figure like Bonnin. Addressing the complex interplay between orality that becomes embedded within literacy provides a means for addressing communication, persuasion, and even a concept like survivance in a more expansive fashion. As speech acts become embedded within writing, they continue to present or re-present “voice” and “presence” in new and different ways. As we examine this encoding process more carefully and address the discursive changes inherent within semiotic shift, we can analyze rhetorical production more thoroughly and perhaps more realistically, deepening our understanding of resistance and agency for (multiply) marginalized rhetors working from within dominant culture.

This kind of rhetorical maneuvering, the ability to engage in these multi-genre or multi-faceted forms of rhetorical crafting, can also go a long way toward fostering survivance. As a rhetor’s message moves from oral/aural forms to more material, more visually-based texts, the message arguably tends to assume more authority in modern Euro-American culture and will be more likely to be preserved, if not widely circulated. In his 1994 essay, “Orality in Literacy: Listening to Indigenous Writing” Peter Dickinson calls for scholars and critics to attend more carefully to the ways that indigenous forms of communication and expression often encode or embed oral features within written texts. Dickinson encourages scholars and critics to read written texts with an enhanced sense of “responsive listening”—shifting the ontologies of meaning we traditionally locate as “fixed, written texts to a larger social space that includes the text but also the discursive

context” (332). These considerations are also taken up within the field of rhetoric and composition through some of Malea Powell’s important critical work. In her essay, “Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indian *Use* Writing,” Malea Powell examines early twentieth-century articulations by Bonnin’s colleague, Charles Eastman, and Bonnin’s contemporary, Sarah Winnemucca. Within this review, Powell explains further linkages between Vizenor’s notion of survivance and writing:

[S]urvivance derives from two European theoretical constructs: the Barthesian deconstructive sense of the striptease, where the excessive hiding of the thing is removed and the absence of the thing being hidden is demonstrated, and the Baudrillardian notion of simulation as the absence of the real. Survivance is ‘simulated’ because the striptease of ‘the Indian’ has ruined representation. In order to prevent the same process from undoing the presence of Indian peoples, that presence has to self-consciously include a critique of its own semiotic construction, which is why Vizenor insists that tribal identity is always ironic. It must be in order to counter the simulations of the ‘authentic Indian’ in the manners of dominance. For Vizenor, and for myself, this means not only reimagining the possibilities for existence and ironic identity within Native communities, but also reimagining a scholarly relationship to writings by Indian peoples, one that hears the multiplicities in those writings and in the stories told about them (400-401).

Building upon Dickinson's call and Malea Powell's critical conception of the rhetorics of survivance, much more scholarly work can be done to review Bonnin's rhetorical production as indigenous activism that worked to embed orality within literacy—ways that she may have also worked cross-textually, deploying orality, story, and native presence within and through her nonfiction texts and her politically-oriented writing, more generally, in conjunction with her orations and speech performances.

This brings us to our second lingering consideration, that of agency. As discussed in Chapter One, early scholarship on Bonnin tends to overlook or dismiss her legacy as an effective indigenous activist. Some scholars, and certainly Robert Warrior most pointedly, view Bonnin as an assimilationist and further criticize her early opposition to peyote. However, the close, critical reading of Bonnin's rhetorical production found here within Chapters Two and Three arguably goes a long way toward challenging these earlier perceptions. In my view, Bonnin's crafting of her "Dacotah Ode" and her campaign to "Americanize the First American" clearly evidence agency and more resistance to dominant culture than any scholars have generally found within her speech performances and her corpus of nonfiction work to date.

To support this view, I look to the essay, "On Agency," by historian Walter Johnson first published in 2003. In this work, Johnson expresses reservations about our widespread use of the term, "agency." He argues that scholarship on individuals historically marginalized by race tends to overuse the term "agency" as a rather meaningless framing device that ultimately reduces historically and culturally situated acts of resistance to an abstracted, useless level and obscures important questions about actual possibilities for resistance and self-determination. As Johnson explains:



For example, when historians argue that day-to-day resistance posed an ‘implicit threat’ to the system of slavery, they leave unanswered the question of how isolated acts of sabotage and subterfuge might have grown into an *explicit* threat to slavery. Similarly, when they tell you that slave criminals exposed ‘latent contradictions’ in the philosophy of slavery, they never really tell you if slaveholders cared that their ideology was philosophically incoherent . . . what these and countless similar quotations skate over with their invocation of ‘implicit’ and ‘latent’ meanings is precisely the relationship between individual and collective acts of resistance, the relationship, as it were, between breaking a tool and being Nat Turner. These are both instances of ‘agency’ and yet they are very different in their causes and their consequences, though to say so is not to valorize one over the other, nor to claim that one was ‘resistant’ while the other was not, but to call for clear thinking about their complex inter-relation. (116-117)

Johnson urges scholars to avoid invoking the term “agency” in an overbroad, uncritical fashion. He further encourages scholars working on marginalized figures to resist interpreting “agency” as a term that applies only to overt, active forms of resistance. He notes that minor, limited, embedded acts of resistance or strategic forms of collaboration can be also critically valuable and he calls for scholars to attend more intentionally to unequal power dynamics as well (116-117). Ultimately Johnson calls for scholars to focus more on actual conditions of oppression, asking questions such as: What maneuvers were even possible? Where are moments to actually create a meaningful

rhetorical register? What might that look like? How is agency crafted through moments of both alliance and divergence? (119).

Viewed from this perspective, with these more nuanced forms of assessment as articulated by Walter Johnson, Bonnin's ability to access key rhetorical platforms of the period—as a speaker and through textual production—as well as her sophisticated use of language all provide opportunities for reading her legacy much more transgressively. This may pertain most particularly to her articulations regarding peyote use, which have not been examined closely by any scholar of record, to my knowledge. Ironically, it is possible that Bonnin used the topic of “peyote” as a discursive field familiar to dominant culture in order to create a rhetorical opening that might allow for pointed, more expansive forms of social and political critique related to indigenous activism, more generally. The need for a careful review of Bonnin's public articulations regarding peyote from this enlarged, more nuanced perspective remains.

Indeed, in my view, opportunities for more work on notions of agency related to Bonnin's rhetorical production continue to exist, reaching beyond the scope of this immediate project. My work on Bonnin as a rhetorical figure assumes that she is a product of her time and place in history; that she was a woman who, moment to moment, both transcended and remained constrained by the social and cultural forces of her period. The full range of her rhetorical abilities and her constant refiguring or reworking of available discursive tools—her ability to invoke and perform certain “Indian” or certain “Westernized” identities or some combination thereof, for example—remain rhetorically significant, in my view, but also represent a series of fluid choices or a series of moments

across time and space within a continuous arc of lived experience that worked together to instantiate meaningful forms of indigenous activism.

Nonetheless, while Bonnín's fluid subjectivity allowed her to secure access to audiences and forums that she may have not have otherwise reached, this rhetorical strategy may have complicated efforts to secure more comprehensive, more unified political support for indigenous concerns over time. Bonnín's consistent choice to play "to type" as a part of her many speech performances certainly worked to build networks of interest within dominant culture. This choice arguably garnered access to, and secured more extensive interest from, Women's Clubs, some legislators, and a growing legion of white social reformers interested in the "Indian Cause." However, and perhaps more dangerously, this form of presentation as public communication may have also led many of those very supporters to continue to view Native peoples as an exotic oddity or a "vanishing" curiosity, may have reinforced forms of sentimentalism which led white audiences to believe that Native populations needed their protection or "saving," and may have actually diminished some greater opportunities for self-determination.

Similarly, beyond choosing to work, in part, within prevailing social constructions related to "the Indian" and "Indianness," Bonnín also deliberately linked Native American political interests to the racialized discourses of Americanization widely circulating during the Progressive Era, a time representing the largest spike in immigration and a time when assimilationist anxieties were perhaps at their peak as well. While a number of factors, including her use of this race-based discourse seemed to have helped secure the right of citizenship for many Native Americans in 1924, this discursive choice may have worked to hinder later attempts to secure greater political opportunities

for self-determination. Clearly, more scholarly work should be done to address these lingering questions and concerns related to agency and sustainable forms of rhetorical efficacy.

To conclude this particular moment of inquiry, we must acknowledge that the last decade of Bonnin's life appears to have been marked by great difficulties and no small measure of frustration. Bonnin's political efforts, particularly during the 1930s, continued to be impeded by significant financial pressures, ongoing health concerns, and difficult family-related issues. Bonnin's son, Ohiya, and his wife, Elsie, frequently found themselves unable to care for their four small children. The children moved frequently between Chicago and Washington, D.C. where Gertrude and Raymond cared for them over extended periods. During this same time, the Bonnins attempted to start their own comprehensive, inter-tribal advocacy organization, with little success. Known as the National Council for the American Indian, its formation never really gained traction, despite extensive efforts undertaken by the Bonnins, particularly Gertrude, between 1926 and 1934. Deborah Welch asserts that when Bonnin passed away (reportedly from heart failure brought on by diabetes) in 1938, she died a sad and profoundly disillusioned woman ("New Warriors" 52). Doreen Rappaport claims that Bonnin ended her life "in despair" (160, 166). Certainly, Bonnin's life, at many points, came to be marked by poverty and by powerful forces of social, political, and economic marginalization but her legacy transcends these challenges.

Clearly, the young woman who spoke to the hostile crowd assembled for the Indiana state oratory contest in 1896 learned, over time, to fight effectively for access to, and legitimacy within, several key speaking platforms of her time period. The rhetorical

legacy Bonnin left—the legacy she worked so hard to forge—continues to provide scholars and rhetors with opportunities to think more profoundly about effective forms of articulation, both oral and written, and further regard forms of public expression as fluid, exigent, and situated practices that can embrace and be comprised of more than one cultural tradition. Bonnin used story to infuse contemporaneous experience with native presence and simultaneously invoked traces of alternate, more liberatory discourses as a public speaker, even as she ironically played to type through a kind of absence as the “Indian” figure her audiences frequently expected to encounter. Her success as a rhetor can be attributed in large part to her ability to engage in these fluid, multivalent, cross-cultural rhetorical maneuvers. In this respect, there are many rich avenues of advocacy and activism within Bonnin’s life for scholars to continue to address.

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# APPENDIX: TEXTS OF KEY SPEECHES BY BONNIN REFERENCED WITHIN THIS WORK



## “Side by Side” (First Version) <sup>1</sup>

Performed for the Earlham College Oratory Contest  
Wabash, Indiana  
January 1876

Out of the principles of the Great Charter has arisen in America a nation of free men and free institutions. Among its rivers and mountains, in its stately forests and on its broad prairies, millions of workers have built great factories, commercial highways, fruitful farms, and productive mines. America has great buildings, befitting its social progress. And scholars, statesmen, and religious leaders give expression and force to the religious and humanitarian zeal of a great people.

But let us now roll back the tides of time four hundred years to when America was one great wilderness. Over the trees of the forest curls the smoke of a wigwam. The hills resound with the hunter's shout that dies away with the fleeing deer. On the river glides the hunter's canoe. In his wigwam Laughing Water weaves rainbow-tinted beads into his moccasins. In the evening glow the eyes of the children brighten as the aged brave tells his fantastic legends.

The red man lived in reverential awe of the Great Spirit. The Indians heard his voice in the wind. They saw his frown in a cloud and his smile in the sunbeam. Quick to string his bow for vengeance, he was always ready to bury the hatchet or smoke the pipe of peace. Never was he the first to break a treaty or known to betray a friend.

The invasion by a paler race did not dismay the hospitable Indian. Samoset voiced the feeling of his people as he stood among the winter-weary Pilgrims and cried, “Welcome, Englishmen.” The Indian did not cling selfishly to his lands. Willingly he divided with Roger Williams and William Penn. To Jesuit, to Quaker, to all who kept their faith with him, his loyalty never faltered.

Unfortunately, civilization is not an unmixed blessing. Vices begin to creep into the Indian's life. He learns to crave the European liquid fire. Broken treaties shake his faith in the newcomers. The white man's bullet decimates his tribes and drives him from his home.

What if he fought? His forests were felled; his game frightened away; his streams of finny shoals usurped. He loved his family and defended them. He loved the land of which he was rightful owner. He loved his father's traditions and their graves. Do you wonder that he avenged the loss of his home and being ruthlessly driven from his temples of worship? Is patriotism only in white men's hearts?

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Earlhamite*, Vol. 2, Richmond, IN: March 16, 1896, 177-179 and reprinted in Rappaport, 61-64.



The charge of cruelty has been brought against the Indian. But let it be remembered, before condemning the red man, that while he burned and tortured frontiersmen, Puritan Boston burned witches and hanged Quakers, and the Southern aristocrat beat his slaves and set bloodhounds on the track of him who dared to aspire to freedom. The Indian brought no greater stain upon his name than these.

Today the Indian is pressed almost to the farther sea. America entered upon her career of freedom and prosperity with the declaration that "all men are born free and equal." Can you as Americans deny equal opportunities to an American people in their struggle to rise from ignorance and degradation?

We come from mountain fastnesses, from cheerless plains, from far-off low-wooded streams, seeking "white man's ways." We seek labor and honest independence. We seek knowledge and wisdom and your skills in industry and in art. We seek to understand your laws and the genius of your noble institutions. We seek to unite with yours our claim to a common country. We seek to stand side by side with you in ascribing honor to our nation's flag. America, I love thee. "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."



“Side by Side” (Second Version) <sup>2</sup>

Performed for the Indiana State College Oratory Contest

Indianapolis, Indiana

February-March 1896

The universe is the product of evolution. An ascending energy pervades all life. By slow degrees nations have risen from the mountain foot of their existence to its summit. In the wild forests of northern Europe two thousand years ago roamed the blue-eyed Teuton. To the lowlands by the northern sea came the war-like Saxon, ere long to begin his bloody conquest of Britain. Yet fierce and barbarous as he was, the irrepressible germ of progress lay deeply implanted in his nature. His descendants have girdled the globe with their possessions. To-day it is no longer a debatable question whether it shall be Anglo-Saxon or Cossack, constitutional law or imperial decree, that is destined to mold the character of governments and to determine the policies of nations.

Out of a people holding tenaciously to the principles of the Great Charter has arisen in America a nation of free men and free institutions. On its shores two oceans lavish the products of the world. Among its rivers, mountains and lakes, in its stately forests and on its broad prairies, like rolling seas of green and gold, millions of toiling sovereigns have established gigantic enterprises, great factories, commercial highways, and have developed fruitful farms and productive mines. The ennobling architecture of its churches, schools, and benevolent institutions; its municipal greatness, keeping pace with social progress; its scholars, statesmen, authors and divines, giving expression and force to the religious and humanitarian zeal of a great people—all these reveal a marvelous progress. Thought is lost in admiration of this matchless scene over which floats in majesty the starry emblem of liberty.

But see! At the bidding of thought the tide of time rolls back four hundred years. The generations of men of all nations, kindreds, and tongues, who have developed this civilization in America, return to the bosom of the old world. Myriad merchantmen, fleets, and armaments shrink and disappear from the ocean. Daring explorers in their frail crafts hie to their havens on the European shore. The fleet of discovery, bearing under the flag of Spain the figure of Columbus, recedes beyond the trackless sea. America is one great wilderness again. Over the trees of the primeval forest curls the smoke of the wigwam. The hills resound with the hunter's shout that dies away with the fleeing deer. On the river glides his light canoe. In the wigwam Laughing Water weaves into moccasins the rainbow-tinted beads. By gleaming council fire brave warriors are stirred by the rude eloquence of their chief. In the evening-glow the eyes of the children brighten as the aged brave tells his fantastic legends. The reverent and poetic natures of these forest children feel the benign influence of the Great Spirit; they hear his voice in the wind; see his frown in the storm cloud; his smile in the sunbeam. Thus in reverential awe the Red Man lived. His was the life that is the common lot of human kind. Bravely did he struggle with famine and disease. He felt his pulses hasten in the joyous freedom of the hunt. Quick to string his bow for vengeance; ready to bury the hatchet or smoke the pipe

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<sup>2</sup> From the *Earlhamite* (no further cite given), and reprinted in Davidson and Norris, xlv, 222-226.

of peace; never was he first to break a treaty or known to betray a friend with whom he had eaten salt.

The invasion of his broad dominions by a paler race brought no dismay to the hospitable Indian. Samoset voiced the feeling of his people as he stood among the winter-weary Pilgrims and cried, "Welcome, Englishmen." Nor did the Indian cling selfishly to his lands; willingly he divides with Roger Williams and with Penn, who pay him for his own. History bears record to no finer examples of fidelity. To Jesuit, to Quaker, to all who kept their faith with him, his loyalty never failed.

Unfortunately civilization is not an unmixed blessing. Vices begin to creep into his life and deepen the Red Man's degradation. He learns to crave the European liquid fire. Broken treaties shake his faith in the new-comers. Continued aggressions goad him to desperation. The White Man's bullet decimates his tribes and drives him from his home. What if he fought? His forests were felled; his game frightened away; his streams of finny shoals usurped. He loved his family and would defend them. He loved the fair land of which he was rightful owner. He loved the inheritance of his fathers, their traditions, their graves; he held them a priceless legacy to be sacredly kept. He loved his native land. Do you wonder still that in his breast he should brood revenge, when ruthlessly driven from the temples where he worshipped? Do you wonder still that he skulked in forest gloom to avenge the desolation of his home? Is patriotism a virtue only in Saxon hearts? Is there no charity to cover his crouching form as he stealthily opposed his relentless foe?

The charge of cruelty has been brought against the Indian; but the White Man has been the witness and the judge. Anglo-Saxon England, with its progressive blood, its long continued development of freedom and justice, its eight centuries of Christian training, burned the writhing martyr in the fires of Kenith field from a sense of duty. In the name of religion and liberty, the cultured Frenchman, with his inheritance of Roman justice, ten centuries of Christian ideas, murders his brother on that awful night of St. Bartholomew, and during the Reign of Terror swells the Seine with human blood. Let it be remembered, before condemnation is passed upon the Red Man, that, while he burned and tortured frontiersmen, Puritan Boston burned witches and hanged Quakers, and the Southern aristocrat beat his slaves and set blood hounds on the track of him who dared aspire to freedom. The barbarous Indian, ignorant alike of Roman justice, Saxon law, and the Gospel of Christian brotherhood, in the fury of revenge has brought no greater stain upon his name than these.

But what have two centuries of contact with the foremost wave of Anglo-Saxon civilization wrought for him?

You say they have all passed away,  
That noble race—and brave;  
That their light canoes have vanished  
From off the crested wave:  
That mid the forests where they roamed  
There rings no hunter's shout;

You say their conelike cabins  
 That clustered o'er the vale  
 Have disappeared—as withered leaves  
 Before the autumn's gale.

If in their stead, we have to-day a race of blighted promise, will you spurn them? You, whose sires have permitted the most debasing influences to surround these forest children, brutalizing their nobler instincts until sin and corruption have well nigh swept them from the Earth?

To-day the Indian is pressed almost to the farther sea. Does that sea symbolize his death? Does the narrow territory still left to him typify the last brief day before his place on Earth “shall know him no more forever?” Shall might make right and the fittest alone survive? Oh Love of God and His “Strong Son,” thou who liftest up the oppressed and succorest the needy, is thine ear grown heavy that it cannot hear his cry? Is thy arm so shortened, it cannot save? Dost thou not yet enfold him in thy love? Look with compassion down, and with thine almighty power move this nation to the rescue of my race. To take the life of a nation during the slow march of centuries seems not a lighter crime than to crush it instantly with one fatal blow. Our country must not shame her principles by such consummate iniquity. Has the charity which would succor dying Armenia no place for the Indian at home? Has America's first-born forfeited his birthright to her boundless opportunities? No legacy of barbarism can efface the divine image in man. No tardiness in entering the paths of progress can destroy his divinely given capabilities. No lot or circumstance, except of his own choosing, can invalidate his claim to a place in the brotherhood of man or release more fortunate, more enlightened people from the obligation of a brother's keeper. Poets sing of a coming federation of the world, and we applaud. Idealists dream that in this commonwealth of all humanity the divine spark in man shall be the only test of citizenship, and we think of their dream as future history. America entered upon her career of freedom and prosperity with the declaration that “all men are born free and equal.” Her prosperity has advanced in proportion as she has preserved to her citizens this birthright of freedom and equality. Aside from the claims of a common humanity, can you as consistent Americans deny equal opportunities with yourselves to an American people in their struggle to rise from ignorance and degradation? The claims of brotherhood, of the love that is due a neighbor—race, and of tardy justice have not been wholly lost on your hearts and consciences.

The plaintive melodies, running from his tired, but bravely enduring soul, are heard in heaven. The threatening night of oblivion lifts. The great heart of the nation sways us with the olive branch of peace. Some among the noblest of this country have championed our cause. Within the last two decades a great interest in Indian civilization has been awakened; a beneficent government has organized a successful system of Indian education; training schools and college doors stand open to us. We clasp the warm hand of friendship everywhere. From honest hearts and sincere lips at last we hear the hearty welcome and Godspeed. We come from mountain fastnesses, from cheerless plains, from far-off low-wooded streams, seeking the “White Man's ways.” Seeking your skill in industry and in art, seeking labor and honest independence, seeking the treasures of

knowledge and wisdom, seeking to comprehend the spirit of your laws and the genius of your noble institutions, seeking by a new birthright to unite with yours our claim to a common country, seeking the Sovereign's crown that we may stand side by side with you in ascribing royal honor to our nation's flag. America, I love thee. "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God."



“A Dacotah Ode to Washington”<sup>3</sup>

Performed at the Washington Monument

Washington, D.C.

June 22, 1922

PROCEEDINGS HELD IN THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT, WASHINGTON, D.C., UPON THE DEDICATION OF THE MEMORIAL STONE PLACED IN THAT MONUMENT BY THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA ON JUNE 22, 1922, SENATOR THOMAS STERLING PRESIDING.

“A Dacotah Ode to Washington,” by Mrs. Bonnin

Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala Sa), a native Indian woman from the Yankton Agency, but now residing in Washington, in Indian costume, read an original prose poem entitled, “A Dacotah Ode to Washington.”

The Mystic Circle

Upon the prairie grass sat aged men and women, in mystic circle, their bronzed faces upturned to the stars. Through many winters their once raven hair was whitened till in the uncertain twilight on the plains it appeared luminous about their heads. White blossoming manhood, white flowering womanhood, these seven Dacotah wicarcana and winocrana held secret conclave under the night sky.

Keepers of the sacred eagle mysteries, priest and priestess of the Seven Council Fires of their people, they are sages of that other day when Indian camps vied with huge cloud shadows drifting on the playground of the prairie. To-night they have chosen from out their seven a member of the smallest fire, summoned before them a Yankton Dacotah of the young generation. The spokesman, a veritable grandfather of the federated tribes, addressed her saying: “To-morrow is the day of days. Loyal Americans will gather before a great stone shrine at the Nation’s capital. South Dakotans beckon to us, the Dacotah, to join them. We accept the gracious invitation of our pale-face brothers. This is brotherhood.”

As he momentarily paused, his quiet voice floated out into the eternal spaces among the stars, seemed to echo and reecho against the stillness of the night in the concave sky, “This is brotherhood!” The voice continued, “You are called as our messenger, our interpreter. Are you willing to serve?” Without hesitation the answer came, “I am.” The other members of the circle, hitherto silent, responded in approval, “Be it so.” “Hecetu.” The spokesman said, “You have answered well. Service is the highest privilege.”

Together they taught her what to say, placed an eagle plume in her hand. “With this sacred quill write word for word what we have told you here to-night,” they commanded. “At dawn start upon the journey to the great stone shrine with our message.” In final

<sup>3</sup> *Congressional Record*, September 2, 1922, 12162.

parting bade her, "Upon the way, keep your heart warm with love and strong with truth. Lift up your eyes for vision."

### Upon The Way

Straight as an arrow flies from a strong bow, sped the Dacotah runner from the hallow'd circle of the starlit prairie. At break of day hastened with the message, speeding faster, ever faster. Upon the way were many relays, from footsore pony to stagecoach plunging over rough country roads, from coach to the iron horse gliding rapidly upon a steel track. The miraculous journey to the Nation's Capital is made in safety. All faithful to her trust, the messenger stands before the monumental shrine of Washington.

### The Message

"The day of days is at hand. It is now." These the words from the Seven Council Fires of the Dakotah. "We sing the name of our first President. We call him Washington—Ohitika—undaunted leader of nations crying in the dark. He brought them light from the sky, taught them principles of peace and brotherhood; taught the lisping multitudes to say, 'We the people,' counseled them 'to observe good faith and justice toward all nations.'

The Dacotah people carol with lusty throats the memorable deeds of Washington. He scanned with eagle eye the hope of a united people and happy; beheld the vision of democratic government. He rose on powerful eagle wings with unswerving purpose attained to lofty virtues of public service.

A victory song we sing to the memory of Washington, who disdained kingship upon a lower realm and preferred to be servant of the people, who by his life demonstrated only 'Right makes might.' Then over all his glorious achievements upheld our sacred emblem, the eagle, pointing to its meaning in all his noble acts.

We venerate the memory of our great pale-face brother, Washington, the chiefest among guardians of spiritual fires—liberty and unity. Washington, thrice worthy of the decoration of the eagle plume, for he left the impress of its meaning upon the hearts and minds of all Americans.

This is our glad song to-day. The eagle represents the conscious spirit of man, soaring into the silent upper air for meditation and spiritual communion, soaring away from the transitory turmoils of the day, into the heights, there gaining wider vision, added strength, and wisdom, there finding the secret of joyous being, unburdened from the pettiness of make-beliefs.

Comrades of the earth, the hope our humanity lies in the preservation of high ideals, in holding fast to these symbols and precepts bequeathed to us through all ages and races of men till we have learned their innermost lesson. It is well that the sacred eagle is carved upon America's gold, lest we forget in the heat of world commerce our brotherhood upon earth. It is well that the eagle is engraved upon the buttons and insignia of our brave men,

lest we forget in the wild flurry of swift locomotion and radio communication to perfect our relationships man to man, nation to nation, with justice and mercy.

Long live the memory of Washington, whose praises we sing this day of days!

Long live the eagle principles he inculcated in the hearts of the people!

Then shall come many days of peace, prosperity, and happiness!”





“Indian Welfare Work Will Be Undertaken”<sup>4</sup>

Speech Fragments Attributed to Bonnin  
General Federation Biennial Council Meeting  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
June 13-June 17, 1921

. . . . The Great Spirit knows my heart is full! Words are so deep in my heart I cannot utter them without tears. As an educated woman I have tried as interpreter to make America, which is so generous to all other races of the world, understand the longing of her own people, the first Americans, to become citizens of this great republic. Children of the Great Spirit they are, the same as you, and as worthy as any other race of recognition . . . .

. . . . At present they are but prisoners of the state, without citizenship rights, ruled by superintendents who are given almost unlimited powers over them. They are kept in ignorance instead of being trained to useful labor. Our dear friends here have asked you to establish an Indian Departemnt [sic] in your federation. O sisters, work to that end; work in cooperation that the stain upon our country in the treatment of my people may be wiped out. This is the happiest day of my life and you have just taken the greatest step made in American civilization toward uplifting the aborigine.

You have enfranchised the black and are now actively waging a campaign of Americanization among the foreign born. Why discriminate against the noble aborigines of America—they who have no father-mother-land?

The gospel of humanitarianism, like charity, must begin at home. Americanize the first Americans! Give them freedom to hold open forums for the expression of their thought, to do their own thinking, to exercise their own judgement[sic], to manage their own business, and finally, to become citizens of this republic whose constitution entitles each individual to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

We, the American Indians, insist upon recognition of the fact that we are really normal and quite worth-while human beings.

We want American citizenship for every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States.

We want a democracy wheel whose hub shall be an organization of progressive educated Indian citizens and whose rim shall be the Constitution of your American Government—a wheel whose segments shall become alive with growing community interests and thrift activities of the Indians themselves. Indians proved their loyalty to your country by their unequalled volunteer service in your army in the World War.

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<sup>4</sup> *General Federation News*, August 1921, pages 1, 9.

But whenever a plea for human rights is made, a despotic-grown bureaucracy, known as the Bureau of Indian affairs, with a \$14,000,000 hub and a rim of autocratic discretionary powers, between which are the segments suppressing the energies of the Indian people—issues contrary arguments through its huge machinery best known to itself. It silences our friends by picturing to them the Indians ‘utter lack of business training and how easily they would fall victims to the wiles of unscrupulous white men.’

It is true that Indians lack business training. Therefore, I would suggest business schools for the Indians, together with a voice in their own affairs, that they may have an opportunity to overcome their ignorancce [sic] and strengthen their weakness.

It is also true that they are at this time the ‘victim of the wiles of unscrupulous white men’ which the Bureau urges it would save them from, and I would suggest that Congress would enact more stringent laws to restrain these very white men, and further, that the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which through 90 years has steadily enlarged itself, regardless of the diminishing Indian population, be relieved of its practically unlimited autocratic supervision of an orderly people now kept prisoners on small remnants of land not shown on our maps in a prolonged wardship, never intended to be permanent, but assumed by the Government as an emergency measure and not compatable [sic] with the idea of American freedom and American ideals, and contrary to the very constitution itself of the ‘land of the free.’



### **"Plea is Made! To Americanize First American"<sup>5</sup>**

One of the sensations of the General Federation conference was the paper read by Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), of Washington, D.C., "Americanize the First American." Her paper as follows:

"During two summer moons I followed Indian trails over an undulating prairie. The blue canopy of sky came down and touched the earth with a circular horizon. Within such an enclosure of infinite space, virgin soil appeared like a heaving brown sea, slightly tinged with green—a profoundly silent sea. Far out upon its eternal waves now and then came into sight a lone houseboat of crude logs. A captain on one of these strange crafts wirelessly to me a 'S.O.S.' My inquiry brought the answer: 'Many of these houseboats are set adrift with a funeral pyre for a burial at sea.'

In low log huts, adrift upon their reservation containing approximately 5,000 square miles, are the souls of 7, 500 Sioux. So widely scattered are they that time and perseverance were required to make even a limited round of visits in the burning sun and parching wind of midsummer.

Listening one day to a sad story of the influenza epidemic among these Indians two years ago, I closed my eyes and tried to imagine this great wild area held in the frigid embrace of winter. I tried to visualize two government physicians going forth in a Dakota blizzard to visit the sick and dying Sioux. Had they divided the territory evenly between them, each would have had to traverse 2, 500 square miles to attend to 3,750 Indian people. Could they have traveled like whirlwinds to respond to the cries for help, their scant supply of medicines would have been exhausted far too soon. It would have been a physical impossibility for these two wise men to vie with the wind, so they did not. They received their salary as quickly for treating one Indian as if they had cared for a thousand. Therefore, the small medical supply was saved and the Indians died unattended.

### **In Bitter Cold**

How bitter is the cold of this frozen landscape where the fire of human compassion is unkindled! It is a tragedy to the American Indian and the fair name of America that the good intentions of a benevolent government are turned into channels of inefficiency and criminal neglect. Nevertheless, the American Indian is our fellow-man. The time is here when for our own soul's good we must acknowledge him. In the defense of democracy his utter self-sacrifice was unequaled by any other class of Americans. What now does democracy mean to him and his children?

Many Indian children are orphans through the inevitable havoc of war and influenza epidemic. Poor little Indian orphans! Who in the world will love them as did their own fathers and mothers? Indians love their children dearly. Never in all history was there an Indian mother who left her darling in a basket upon a doorstep. Indians do not believe in

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<sup>5</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 24, 1921, page B6.

corporal punishment. They are keenly aware that children are spirits from another realm, come for a brief sojourn on earth. When and where they found this great truth is wrapped in as much mystery as the origin of their race, which ever puzzles thinking men and women of today. If a correction is necessary, they speak quietly and tenderly to the intelligent soul of the child. Appreciation of the spiritual reality of the child places the Indian abreast with the most advanced thought of the age—our age, in which one of the notable signs of progress is the coordination of humanitarian and educational organizations for child welfare. It is a wonderful work to inculcate in the world's children today the truths accrued from the ages, that in the near future, when they are grown-up men and women, the world shall reap an ideal harvest. Children are to play, on the world stage, their role in solving the riddle of human redemption.

Speaking of the constructive and widespread activities of the Junior Red Cross, Arthur William Dunn, specialist in civic education, said: 'The aim is to cultivate, not only a broad human sympathy, but also an Americanism with a world perspective.' Among other things, a school of correspondence is started between the children of America, Europe and Asia. Loving the wee folks as I do, and concerned for the salvation of my race, I am watching eagerly for the appearance of the Indian child in the world drama.

Where are those bright-eyed, black-haired urchins of the out-of-doors? Where are those children whose fathers won so much acclaim for bravery in the world war now closed?

### **Race Is Blighted**

They are on Indian reservations—small remnants of land not shown on our maps. They are in America, but their environment is radically different from that surrounding other American children. A prolonged warship[sic], never intended [sic] to be permanent, but assumed by our government as an emergency measure, has had its blighting effect upon the Indian race. Painful discrepancies in the meaning of American freedom to the Indian are revealed.

These differences prevail, not only on one, but on every Indian reservation. Sufficient to say that by a system of solitary isolation from the world the Indians are virtually prisoners of war in America. Treaties with our government made in good faith by our ancestors are still unfulfilled, while the Indians have never broken a single promise they pledged to the American people. American citizenship is withheld from some three-fourths of the Indians of the United States. On their reservations they are held subservient to political appointees upon whom our American congress confers discretionary powers. These are unlovely facts, but they are history. Living conditions on the reservations are growing worse. In the fast approach of winter I dread to think of the want and misery the Sioux will suffer on the Pine Ridge reservation.

Womanhood of America, to you I appeal in behalf of the red man and his children. Heed the lonely mariner's signal of distress. Give him those educational advantages pressed with so much enthusiasm upon the foreigners. Revoke the tyrannical powers of government superintendents over a voiceless people and extend American opportunities to the first American—the red man."

# Paige Allison Conley

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

## EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, Composition and Rhetoric  
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, May 2013

M.A. LIT, Comparative Literature and Art History  
Northwestern University, June 2004

J.D.  
University of Wisconsin–Madison Law School, May 1986

B.A., Political Science with Distinction  
University of Wisconsin–Madison, December 1982

## ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor of English, Director of Developmental Writing  
Hiram College, August 2012–Present

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English,  
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, August 2008–May 2012

Writing Instructor, Liberal Studies Department  
Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, September 2009–December 2009

English 095 Coordinator, Department of English,  
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, August 2009–May 2011

First-Year Seminar Coordinator and Service Learning Coordinator,  
Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 2005–May 2008

## NONACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Substitute Teacher, University School of Milwaukee, Upper School English Department,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 2003–May 2004

Environmental Staff Attorney, Briggs and Stratton Corporation Legal Department,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 1993–September 1996

Litigation Associate, Charne, Glassner, Tehan, Clancy, and Taitelman, s.c.,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 1986–September 1993

## ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

### BOOK CHAPTERS AND REVIEWS

- Conley, Paige A. "Ethos as Strategically Negotiating Essence: Gertrude Simmons Bonnin and Her Early Twentieth-Century Legacy of Indigenous Activism." *Women's Ethos: Intersections of Feminisms and Rhetorics*. Eds., Rebecca Jones, Nancy Myers, Kathleen J. Ryan, forthcoming.
- Conley, Paige A. "Review of *Changing is Not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*." *American Indian Quarterly* 36.3 (Summer 2012): 382-384. Print.

### PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

- Conley, Paige A., "This Speaking Leaf: Vera Connolly's *Good Housekeeping* Crusade for the Indian Cause." *Peitho: A Journal of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition* 15.1 (Fall/Winter 2012): 66-100. Print.
- Conley, Paige A. and Maria L. Hamlin, "Justice-Learning: Exploring the Efficacy with Low-Income, First-Generation College Students." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 16.1 (Fall 2009): 47-58. Print.
- Conley, Paige A., "Catesby, Audubon, and the Discovery of the New World." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, Autumn 2009. Web.
- Conley, Paige A., "Fumeuse de Haschisch: Emile Bernard in Egypt." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, Autumn 2006. Web.

## NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

- "Opening New Avenues of Activism for American 'Housewives' and other Gentle Readers: Vera Connolly's *Good Housekeeping* Crusade for the Indian Cause." Panel Presentation, Conference on College Composition and Communication, St. Louis, Missouri: March 2012.
- "The Writing Center: A Critical Isthmus for Basic Writers?" Panel Presentation, Midwest Writing Center Association Conference, Madison, Wisconsin: October 2011.
- "'And They Had the Nerve to Wear Moccasins': Racialized Subjects in the Personal Correspondence and the Public Rhetoric of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, 1917-1936." Native American Indian Studies Association Conference, Sacramento, California: May 2011.
- "Sacred Circles and Eagle Plumes Gathered before a Great Stone Shrine: Zitkala-Ša's Dacotah Ode and the Composition Classroom." Panel Presentation, Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, Georgia: March 2011.

- "Zitkala-Ša: Activist." Newberry Library Graduate Student Conference, D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies. Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois: July-August 2010.
- "The Body Observed: Visual Culture, Identity, and Marginality." Panel Presentation, Rhetoric Society Biennial Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota: May 2010.
- "Reflections on Teaching, Speaking, and Writing: Freshman Composition and Public Speaking as a Learning Community." Roundtable Discussion Participant, Rhetoric Society of America Biennial Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota: May 2010.
- "Sighting Patty/Situating Tania: American Visual Culture, Rhetorics of the Body, and Gender Unrest." Panel Presentation, Visual Culture and Global Practices Conference, California State University-Long Beach: March 2010.
- "'Cracking' Criticality in the Twenty-First Century Composition Classroom: Exploring Incongruity through Multimodal Free-writing." Poster Presentation, NCTE Annual Convention, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: November 2009.
- "Remapping a Space for Rhetoric: Zitkala-Ša's Dacotah Ode, (Retooled) *Techne*, and the Washington Monument." Panel Presentation, Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Biennial Conference, East Lansing, Michigan: October 2009.
- "Developing Youth Involvement and Leadership through Justice-Learning." National Service Learning Conference, Advanced Track Workshop, Minneapolis, Minnesota: April 2008.
- "Reframing Privilege, Power, and Difference for First-Generation College Students through Justice-Learning: Exploring the Efficacy of One Community-Based Approach." American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Individual Paper Session Presentation, New York City, New York: March 2008.

## ACADEMIC GRANTS AND AWARDS

- Tinsley Helton Dissertation Fellowship (\$18,000)  
Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, August–December 2012
- Newberry Consortium for American Indian Studies Short-Term Fellow (\$5,000)  
Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, August–September 2012
- Library Scholar Research Award (\$2,500)  
Columbia University Libraries, July 2012
- Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute Fellow  
Free Speech Workshop led by Susan C. Jarratt and Katherine Mack  
University of Colorado–Boulder, June 2011
- Newberry Consortium for American Indian Studies Literary Studies Fellow (\$500)  
Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, March 2011



Newberry Consortium for American Indian Studies Summer Institute Fellow (\$1,500)  
Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, July–August 2010

Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute Fellow  
Visual Rhetoric Seminar led by Robert Hariman and John Lucaites  
Pennsylvania State University, June 2009

James E. Sappenfield Scholarship Award (\$1,500)  
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, English Department, May 2010

Chancellor's Graduate Student Award (\$12,500)  
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, August 2008

Elizabeth Dipple Award for Best MALIT Graduate Paper  
Northwestern University, June 2004

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin  
IRB/Human Research Review Board Member, June 2006–Present

Marquette University High School  
Member, Lacrosse Athletic Board, August 2007–May 2011

Community Preschool of Milwaukee  
Member, Board of Directors, August 1993–May 1999

Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee  
Member, Board of Directors, September 1989–September 1996

Milwaukee Young Lawyers Association, Pro Bono Service  
Providing legal aid to indigent clients, September 1986–July 1992

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art  
American Society for the History of Rhetoric  
College Art Association  
Conference on College Composition and Communication  
Coordinating Council for Women in History  
Council of Writing Program Administrators  
Modern Language Association  
National Council of Teachers of English  
Native American Indigenous Studies Association  
Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society  
Rhetoric Society of America  
Wisconsin State Bar Association  
Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition